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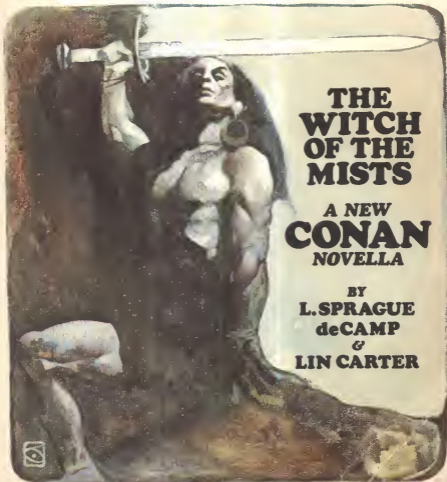
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THE WITCH OF THE MISTS

A NEW
CONAN
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Fantastic

Science Fiction & Fantasy Stories

BIG 20TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE
ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

AUGUST, 1972

VOL. 21, NO. 6

**AVRAM DAVIDSON'S OUTSTANDING
 NEW NOVEL, THE FORGES OF NAINLAND
 ARE COLD**

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**TED
WHITE**

editorial



TWENTY YEARS—has it been that long?

I remember when the first issue of **FANTASTIC** was published, Spartan of title (just **FANTASTIC**, nothing else), dated "Summer, 1952," and on the stands in the spring of that year. I was a freshman in high school, smuggling sf magazines and books into most of my classes, reading the equivalent of three novels a day, my appetite for sf voracious.

Has it been that long? Where were *you* in 1952—and what were you doing then?

A lot of new sf magazines were appearing on the stands in 1952—and most of them lasted less than a dozen issues. Indeed, of all the new titles which were launched in 1952 and the years since, only *one* has survived—**FANTASTIC**.

1952—the year General Eisenhower was elected President on the pledge that he would stop the war in Korea. (Did you know that the truce commission he set up is *still* meeting?)

1952—television was just establishing itself, Milton Berle was king and wrestling dominated the tube. Little did we realize what tv would do our society—or to our reading habits.

1952—the year the pulp magazine industry finally went under.

In 1952 the Ziff-Davis Publishing Company still had two pulp titles left: **AMAZING STORIES** and **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES**. Ziff-Davis had purchased

AMAZING in 1938 from its former publisher. A year later **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES** was launched as a companion magazine, its earliest issues published in the "bedsheet" size with trimmed edges. But **FA** never quite established itself as a first-class magazine in its own right, and all too soon it was playing second fiddle to **AMAZING** in the regular, shaggy-edged pulp format.

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES was the spiritual, if not literal ancestor of this magazine, a complicated lineage which was further confused by the fact that ultimately **FA** was merged with **FANTASTIC** (with the latter's May-June 1953 issue), but almost without mention, like a poor relative the passing of whom the family preferred not to acknowledge. (For that single issue, volume 2 number 3, the indicia said "**FANTASTIC** [combined with **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES**].") There was no further mention of **FA**, in that issue or the issues which followed.) The question, then, of anniversaries is muddled—might we not, with some justification, celebrate our *thirty-third* anniversary this year, instead of our twentieth? But no—**FANTASTIC ADVENTURES** is dead—quite dead, surviving not even in the volume numbering of this magazine, honored in passing only by our now-discontinued series of "classic" reprints from its pages. **FA** is dead—long live **FANTASTIC**!

This must have been the feeling in

Ziff-Davis' offices when, in 1952, FANTASTIC was first thrust out into the world.

It was a well packaged magazine, the covers printed in six colors (including gold), the back cover a handsome reproduction of Pierre Roy's "Danger on the Stairs" from the Museum of Modern Art, the interior paper of good quality, with sparkling layouts and art by the best in the field (Finlay, Emsch, Lawrence, et al). The contents page of that first issue reads as impressively now as it did then:

"Six and Ten Are Johnny" by Walter M. Miller, Jr.

"For Heaven's Sake" by Sam Martinez

"Someday They'll Give Us Guns" by Paul W. Fairman

"Full Circle" by H. B. Hickey

"The Runaway" by Louise Lee Outlaw

"The Opal Necklace" by Kris Neville

"The Smile" by Ray Bradbury

"And Three to Get Ready" by H. L. Gold

"What If" by Isaac Asimov

"Professor Bingo's Snuff" by Raymond Chandler

—One hell of an inaugural issue!

A lot of money was spent on those early issues of FANTASTIC, and I would guess that they came closer than anything else he edited to Howard Browne's idea of a dream-magazine.

I READ THAT FIRST ISSUE with mixed feelings, however. Something about the way the magazine was put together did not communicate with me then. There was an air not only of "class" but also of a strange sort of snobbery. That back cover painting, for instance—a snake slithering down a staircase—what was so "fantastic" about it? Had it been published simply because the painting was on exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art (its ownership credited on the back cover itself)?

It also seemed to me then that the magazine lacked any editorial personality. If you've been reading FANTASTIC for any length of time, you'll have noted that I'm a strong believer in giving a magazine an identifiable editorial personality, with (among other things) signed, communicative editorials. I suppose I picked up this bias from the magazines I enjoyed most when I first began reading the sf magazines. Editors like Ray Palmer (who edited FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for its first ten years, but whom I knew better in 1952 as the editor/publisher of *Other Worlds*), Sam Merwin and later Sam Mines (editors, in turn, of *Startling Stories* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, magazines which, despite their pulpish titles, published much of the best sf of the late forties and early fifties) and John Campbell (whose editorship of *Astounding/Analog* was a total reflection of the man) never hesitated to speak their minds to their readers, and I had come to expect this.

The sf pulp magazines—the majority of them, anyway—published editorials, letters and other assorted features as a matter of course. Not all of them reflected that much of their actual editors (in the early forties SS and TWS were "edited" by "Sarge Saturn," whose space-jive seemed to be aimed at about the level of none-too-bright eight-year-olds), but the attempt was made to give the readers something participatory, something beyond just the stories themselves.

But as the pulps began changing over to digest-sized magazines or falling by the wayside, these features began disappearing. I have no idea why. Space alone is not the answer, and editors like John Campbell made no concessions to any changes in format (*Astounding* went from bedsheet to pulp to digest, all in the space of two years, in the early forties, anticipating the rest of the field by almost ten

(Continued on page 110)

Avram Davidson, Hugo winner and Edgar winner (from the Mystery Writers of America), former editor of The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, has in such works as his Vergil Magus novel, The Phoenix and the Mirror, written some of the finest fantasy to be published in the twentieth century. The novel which begins below is of a piece; it is also the sequel to his "Arnten of Ultima Thule," which appeared in the August, 1971, If. Taken together, both stories will be published in book form by Avon Books as Ursus of Ultima Thule. Although "The Forges of Nainland Are Cold" is a complete novel in itself, Avram has prefaced it with a Prolegomenon in which "Arnten of Ultima Thule" is briefly recapped, and the land of Thule is introduced . . .

THE FORGES OF NAINLAND ARE COLD

AVRAM DAVIDSON

Illustrated by MIKE KALUTA

(First of Two Parts)

PROLEGOMENON

IF EVEN CONTINENTS drift and flow, it is not surprising that names of places should do the same. There is, for example, the name of Britain. There is North Britain (Scotland), West Britain (Ireland), Great Britain (England, Wales, and Scotland), Brittany (in France), and New Britain (a city in Connecticut and a large island near New Guinea). (There is, for that matter, Guinea, a country in Africa . . .) And there was Thule. Where was Thule? Was it the Orkney Islands? Norway? Iceland? Suppose there was not only the Thule of Pytheas (long

derided as a fiction, but now accepted as a fact), suppose there was—long, long before Pytheas—a Farther Thule . . . a Farthest Thule . . . in short, another Thule entirely. Old Thule. The original Thule. And suppose the theory to be correct which holds that within the lifetime of *homo sapiens*, the weight of the two polar ice-caps caused the Earth to undergo a cataclysmic shift; so that our present polar zones now cover areas once temperate. And so suppose that buried under the all but immemorial ice of the interior of one of the great Arctic islands (say Spitzbergen . . . Nova Zemlya . . . Greenland. . .) lies buried, forever



beyond our reach and ken, the remains of an ancient race and culture: that of the people of Thule. Old Thule. Ultimate Thule. An Arctic Atlantis, immersed beneath ice instead of ocean.

This, then, is a tale of the original Ultima Thule—before its people fled a most invincible of enemies; before—long before—they fled south, and farther south again: there, either to be obliterated by (or, likelier, absorbed by) other men and other cultures—their very tongue and speech forgotten . . . one word alone surviving, thrown up like a piece of wrack or wreckage upon an inhospitable shore: a word now part of every language, though now traceable to none: the name of their lost and ancient homeland: the name of *Thule*.

We have a word for the belief that a human being can and does change into an animal or other non-human creature, the word is *lycanthropy*, and we regard it as a totally aberrant state and we treat it with electric shock "therapy," straight-jackets, and massive doses of sedative drugs. *We*, but not *they*. In the Aran and Scilly Islands and the Outer Hebrides, men are remembered who were sometimes seals. In Malaysia there are respectable citizens who are occasionally tigers; along the Amazon you may meet men who are part-time porpoises. Among some of the Indians of Northern California are those who moonlight, as it were, by becoming bears. This, however, is regarded as not quite the thing. —And just what are all *those* creatures upon totem poles—or, for that matter, upon coats of arms? These beliefs, these doings, have been known in all times and in every place and nation. And so they were known in Thule.

"Arnten of Ultima Thule" told the story of a nameless boy who was scorned and feared as "the son of the bear." Iron was dying in Thule; rust raged as a plague, incurable even by the not-quite-human Nains, who alone knew the secret of iron-work. Fear and distrust was in the air like an evil smell. Men feared King Orfas (whose witchery-beast was the wolf), the king feared the Nains, the Nains feared the day when their forges would grow cold. Tall Roke the hunter did not fear the scorned boy whose father was said to be a bear, and brought him along as part of a group to hunt wild horses. They found no wild horses, they found a rogue mammont instead. By the cowardice of another boy, Whey-face, the straight-tusked mammont was made aware of their presence, and attacked them—leaving many dead, and Tall Roke dying.

Only three survived, all boys: Whey-face, Corm, and the "Bear's bastard." Whey-face threw the blame on the latter, who fled for his life into the outlands. With the help of the Nain-folk he found his father, who had been long in exile from his kinsman, the jealous King Orfas. Arntat (Bear-father) was a man when in man's-clothes (or in none); he reminded his new-found son; "*and so the bear is in the blood. . .*" Arnten (Bear-son) had found his father, and he had also found All-caller, the great fey horn, which could call up all manner of things. But this happy period was short-lived; for the son and father were both caught by the Kingsmen, and made to toil with the Nain-thralls in the mines for iron. Useless toil, iron continuing to die.

"Feed the Wizards," muttered the

Nains. "They will tell us the cure." But the wolf-King and his hare-Queen and their Chief Witcher, Merred-delphin ("Merred-crow"), ignored this. They believed that Arntat had cursed iron to deprive King and King's Men of weapons; continued to keep him and his son as prisoners. In the attempted escape from the prison-mines, Arntat and the Nain-thralls died. Arnten, once again escaping into the wilds, remembering *The bear is in the blood*, remembering that—somehow—he is to *Feed the Wizards*; Arnten now knew himself to be no more a boy but a swift-grown man.

And faced his weird.

First comes All-Caller, the Great Fey Horn. Next comes True Iron. True Iron casts out False. Next comes Fireborn, firstborn Son of Fire. Fireborn hews False Iron into pieces. All is known to the Wizards, but the Wizards are known to few or none. The Nains know Iron, more ever than Men do know Iron, much more do the Nains know. But there be things which e'en the Nains know not, e'en of Iron: and these do the Wizards know. And if their mouths be closed, there is that which will make them open.

—From THE CHANT OF UÛR-HEVVED-HEVVED-GUÛR

One queen is every queen.

—From THE SONG OF THE BEAR

CHAPTER ONE

IN A PLACE favored by moonlight, where the mandrakes unfold, and lift their faces from their hoods to drink in the silver light, the old man Bab sat drumming a light and hollow sound. Möre than one rhythm did he try be-

fore he found one to their true liking: and he sat and tumbled upon the small drumlet in his lap and watched them swaying back and forth. There are indeed accounts profuse of how to pull them safely from their beds, but no mandrake entire can be procured this way, account or not. First the seeker must find the key which can alone control them, this key being in sound and not in substance: and it will do for every group of them, for each one of every group of them has spored from the same damdrake—it is not widely known that if mandrakes are kept alive unto a seventh season and then exposed to dew and moonlight they will change sex, and spore—hence, the tune that one will dance to is the tune that all will dance to.

The young Arnten (sometimes called Arntenas-Arnten, and sometimes . . . now . . . called, simply, Arn) the young Arnten, slumbering in the woods, dreamed a dream of his past youth, and, awakening, found that part of the dream persisted. Much of the memory of his youth was as sour as the bad taste in his mouth, and he could not be sorry that he had fled that time and scene, though little which had followed it had been good: and some, worse. It had been a kindly word which had gone, "Think no worse of him because some fellow gamed his mad mother, saying, 'I am a bear,'"—though almost all but Tall Roke, whose word it was, had indeed thought every worse of him—Tall Roke who, with other kindly word, had asked him to join the hunt one certain day, he, Bear's Boy, who had never been asked to anything before.

Tall Roke, dead now, and dead for

some time since, lying dead and broken where the roan rogue mammoth had left him: Spear-Teeth, never sought in that hunt for wild white horses: only the boy Corm and the Whey-faced boy and the boy Arnten, who was nobody's son, had turned alive from that hunt: and Whey-face it was whose lying word had turned the blame upon Arnten, the one of them least capable of denying any blame. And, who, incapable of denying this, had fled.

Had fled into the woods from the world of towns and fields and king and dying iron, king half-mad and half-dead himself: the whisper, whisper, whisper: *Orfas King hath himself caught the rust-pox!* . . . though only in a whisper, whisper, whisper . . . for the Orfas (which in the Old Language, the witchery-tongue, means *Wolf*, as Arn means *Bear*), the King of Farthest Thule, had many eyes and many ears. And not the least of these was his chiefmost counsellor, Merred-dolphin. Corby-merred. Merred-crow.

The young Arn, awakening from his slumber in the woods, rubbed eyes and scalp and moved his ears. Still there sounded in those ears the *tum-tum*, *tum-tum*, of the medicine-drums of his old great-uncle, with whom he had lived a half-outcast life before fleeing, not the uncle, but the life. Then—this element of the dream not vanishing—he got up and went in search of it, as he had (it now seemed so long, long ago) gone in search of his unknown sire: man . . . or bear . . . or both. And, interposed between the drum-beats, remembered now, his father's words, "*. . . the bear is in the blood . . . the*

man was in the bear-skin when you were made . . . the bear is in the blood . . ." The words of his father, found, lost, captivity, death. King's kinsman. Bear's bastard. Confusion. He cleared the thoughts from his mind, including one last swift and unbidden one: Woman: Hare: Queen: and, standing up, concentrated on the unfading, still-unfading dream-sound.

Before long he was indeed able to identify it as a soft and hollow drum-drum beat, and, more particularly, as a mandrake drumset. And there was a vision and a picture in his head of an old and heavy damdrake, ponderous and fertile, being slowly drummed along through the moonlight, not so much dancing as waddling. Till at length a proper place was found, and so see the dam, with a sound not unlike that of a sow in oestrus, sink heavily and gratefully into the loam: then from her only silence until a certain moment when she burst open and all her spores one slow second glistened in the moonlight: and then settled all round about the husk of her to filter down deep enough to ponder and to grow.

Arnten saw the drummer bent upon his tune, and he sat upon his haunches and waited and he watched. By and by the drumming slowed and the waving of the mandrakes slowed, too. Finally they sank their heads into their hoods and then their arms fell to their sides and dabbled in the dust and in another moment the tiny hands were settled again in the earth and all was still. The echo of the drumset played in Arnten's ears awhile and he heard the drummer sigh. Next he heard him say, "My sister's daughter's son, will

you not come up and sit beside me here? I am loath to move just yet."

Arnten came and sat beside him. "Surely, then, uncle, I made no sound," he said; "neither did I cast a shadow, being in the dark as I was. And the wind is towards me. How did you know?"

"Nevertheless. You were near the moonlight and the moonlight drank of your presence, so to speak. And I felt your pattern upon my skin. It seems that you have grown much and are much changed in other things, but most of all I perceive that you are strong and well . . . see now these mandrakes: by and by, by moonpull and by music I shall draw them up without touching them, they shall of their own selves draw up their geminated roots and dance upon them. At first a little. Then back into the ground. Then later, more and more, and oftener. At a proper time, they will leave the ground forever and follow me home—"

"A-dancing."

"A-dancing. None way other."

The old man looked at him in the silverlight, and said, "You are grown greater, and there is more to the *more* of you than size and flesh alone. It is my thought that you have found your father."

"Found my father. Found my witchery-bundle. Found my bear-skin. Found even this here, under my arm: tis within this case, a thing called fey horn—"

The old witcher said, softly, "Ah. All-caller. So."

He said, softly, "Your father?"

"—Among his gifts to me . . . Eh? I found him, yes. And the Kingsmen

found us both. Set us to rip red iron-stone with the Nain-thralls in the mine." Stink, and toil. "Thought to keep ahead of dying iron. Vain thought. Twas mined and forged only to rust and rot. And so we all did rust and rot there." Smoke of their burning bracken-beds, flare of guard-torches, terror, confusion, purpose stronger than death. "They be dead, now, Nain-thralls and father. And, not for them, I'd be dead, too." He paused, his face and his throat moving. "There was room for but one at a time through the scape-hole whence the hare had come. They pushed me through, first one. Then there was no more time, not for them, any. Never. And what say thee next, aye? 'Their death-word to me?' Aye. Twas of the wizards that they spoke. *Feed the Wizards. Aye . . .*"

For all the Land of Thule had been fed with fear since iron had begun to rust and die, since the king had fallen sick, perhaps sick with fear, since his fear that foreign invasion would find him weaponless: since the exactions of his men had become entirely instead of merely intermittently remorseless. Since the forges of Nainland had grown cold.

Old Bab and young Arn talked long, there in the silverlight. Through the silverlight and the shadows they talked and walked. Then walked without talking. Crawled a way, beneath ground. And once again were in the old man's medicine-hut.

For a long moment Arnten stood there, familiarity now so very strange, ears supping up the old-familiar sounds, nose snuffing up the old-familiar smells and scents, and—

gradually, as they cast off the scales of darkness—eyes tracing the old-familiar outlines. There on the low bed in the corner, something groaned and moved. All seemed as before. "The old woman is not better, then?" he asked. "The old woman is dead."

"Ah." No more to be said about that. She had not been entirely alive at any time he himself had known her. As to who, then, lay in her bed, moved and groaned, why, doubtless, the witch-uncle had found a woman . . . not, to be sure, a young one . . . hence, one who groaned. But this neat construction vanished at once when the shadow-form on the bed sat up with a start and demanded, in a man's voice which Arnten knew he knew, "Bab, who is with you?"

"Tis well," said witchery-uncle. He moved about the fire, and in a moment it blazed up.

Arnten gasped. "Tall Roke! I thought . . . I saw you dead . . ."

Roke gave forth a wry sound, half chuckle, half bitter groan. "And not you alone," he said. "I was dead. Killed by the rogue mammont. Dead, I was. And therefore to be left for the carrion-feeders . . . even though my breath came back to me, by and by, and I spoke to those who'd come to see how I looked, dead. Spoke? Cried, shrieked, babbled, begged—"

"Tis past," said uncle.

"Never past, for me! My breath wandered in the Dreaming World, I tell you, Half-Bear—I saw the Breaths of the other Deads—they came not to me, though, but with their hands they motioned me away; and with their voices, like the keening of strange

birds, 'tis this which they said to me: *'Back! Back! Go back, Roke! It be not your weird to be here now. Go back, and back,'* they told to me." His hair, though it had been hacked unskillfully with a sharpened shell, was yet longer than Arnten ever had seen it; long and yellow it hung about his scarred face, and he brushed at it awkwardly with an arm and hand which seemed to move not quite right.

But which moved.

"Wife and child have I no more, nor house nor friends nor other things which were mine. The dead lose all right to such, as we all know; nor gain they any such by coming back to life again . . ." His voice was low, deep into his body, and in his face there was something which Arnten had not seen in any man's face before. He felt chilled. And yet he did not look away, there in the medicine-house, more dark than light, smelling of mice and of mandrakes and of many half-dried plants, as Tall Roke, whom he had seen die, looked at him straight and deep.

"But in return for what I have lost, somewhat I gained, Bear's Boy; it concerns you, and as I look at you I see that much which is heavy has befallen you also in the enacting of your own weird since last bloody day we saw each other."

And he lay back down, but beckoned the other two near to him; and long they talked together, and sundry several things they showed each other, while the small fire was fed small sticks, and the smokes moved slowly round and round: and sometimes the smokes found their way out, and sometimes they did not.

II

LIGHT WERE THE early winter snows, but heavy the mood of the hamlet. The common and customary tasks of making ready for the time of cold were gone through—house-walls and roofs put in order, skins of fur cut out and sinew-threads prepared to sew all with for garments, meat and fish smoked and stacked and stored, and wood piles grew—yet the usual satisfaction of doing usual tasks was absent. Hunting and fishing with bone and stone and horn did not yield the yield of iron, and iron continued ill. Now the common central-fire was no longer enough, each house must fire its hearth and for each hearth-fire tax must be paid. The days of felling trees with stone-hacks were not to return as yet, and as yet each house sought the windfallen wood, it was necessary to go farther away for supply. Taxes had increased and were oppressive, and were brutally collected. There were said to be spies. There was certainly uncertainty and fear.

Now and then voices of loud good cheer rang out, and usually they broke off as faces turned with lowering looks to see who was so ill-tempered as to feel well. Mutters and whispers were more common by far. But voices all fell silent when in sight of the low hut in which all knew a dead man lived . . . and a man so suddenly grown in repute as witcher, for having brought him to life again . . . and one who was known to be that Son of the Bear who had been driven forth to die only that spring, and who not only had not died but had grown out of all reasonable

expectation and past all natural rate of growth. These things were but ill thought of, but even less to be thought of at all was to speak ill of them aloud . . . if at all. And so to these three wood and winter peltry-clothes and food were by stealth supplied—though not, of course, by all; and, of course, never out of benevolence . . .

And day by day the dread sight was seen of Dead Roke, as he leaned upon the other two, walking up and down, for all the world as though he were alive: and day by day the strength of his gait and the span of his walk increased. Whey-face and his speckled clan were much given to ill looks and long faces over this, shrugs of incredulity and sighs of despair, groans of horror. Gestures threatening the witchery three. None gainsaid them, but, in truth, being generally believed to be among the King's eyes and ears, they were much more feared and hated than they were supported.

One day as three of ill omen paced slowly back and forth in the lane, a fourth person came into sight . . . stopped still . . . as they walked away again, approached closer to where they had been . . . and so until, at last, they faced each other. Arnten knit his heavy brows, sore memories of boys beating one boy rolling in his mind. Then his memory cleared. "Corm," he said.

The day was cold, but Corm's pallor was not from that, and indeed sweat was on his face. Crows congregated and clamored in a crook tree by the lane, and when they paused the three could hear his troubled breath. He said, "I am afraid. Oh, how I am afraid . . ."

Arnten with one hand took the boy's

hand. With his other hand he took Roke's hand and placed it under his own. The boy's hand trembled. Slowly, then, slowly, Arnten drew his own hand out. And so Corm's hand came to rest upon Roke's. After a long while the trembling ceased. Corm said, "Your hand is warm, and it is longer than mine, and it is the hand of a living man, and not of a dead one . . ."

III

ROKE SAID: "The pain of my body was so great as it lay, broken and bleeding, that I felt I couldn't stay in it, and my breath returned to the Dreaming World. Even when all the Deads called out and cried out to me to return. I would not. Then I saw the bear, The Great Bear, The Dream Bear, with his stars all shining through him, and he came towards me as though he swam through water, although he did not move at all. Then he did move, and he reached forth his starry arm and touched my bosom with his starry hand, and he said to me in his great voice, "*Return . . .*" So I did return, and I lay in my blood and others came and watched me but none helped me. Till at last came Bab, by whose kindness and whose witchery alone I truly returned to life."

He withdrew his hand and opened his upper garment. "And as to what befell me in the Dreaming World, in the Land of the Breaths, in Deads' Land, here is the sign."

On his bosom, as though drawn in blood, but perfectly dry, red as red against the whiteness of his skin, as long and as broad as a full man's hand, was the likeness of a bear.

"Now," said Roke, after Corm, with a hiss and a sigh, had looked at the mark and touched it and then looked at the other three in awe: and looked at them, having drawn himself up, in silent expectation; "Now let us go inside, where there is less cold, and fewer eyes, and fewer ears." This they did, and Arnten told Corm of what he, Arnten, had experienced, he showed him the bear-token and the bear-skin and the witchery-bundle and the great horn which is All-Caller: and Corm spoke of the increasing oppression of the people, of their sufferings from the sickness of iron, from the heavy exactions of the King, from their fear of his eyes and of his spies; of hunger, cold, witchery, and weird. And Corm knelt and touched the bear-things and was made one of their mystérie.

That night the bear came to Arnten in a dream. The bear was there, but said nothing, and Arnten saw many crows, he saw himself make a gesture and all the crows flew off. All the crows but one flew off, and somehow Arnten killed the crow and cut off its head and cut out its tongue and buried the head. And when he awoke and when the others were awake he told his dream. And they talked of it, and they made their plans.

"Who knows how important this may be," said Bab-witchman, "in carrying out what must be done, once Roke is all healed, and capable of doing all things once again."

Arnten left the hut in mid-morning, and Corm followed, a good space behind. The leafless branches of the old crook tree were thick with crows, like so many black leaves. They cawed their

cry to each other again and again, and the dull cold sky echoed with their harsh screams. Arnten made a dash towards the tree and flung out his hand, as though there were a stone in it. Instantly, and with great clamor, the flock took wing and wheeled away . . . all but one, which uttered what seemed a derisive cry to its fearful and departing fellows now making tracks across the sky; then muttered some softer syllables to itself. And Corm placed a stone in a sling from where he stood, behind, and swung and cast and the crow fell dead from the tree.

With a grunt of satisfaction Arnten took up the dead bird and cut out its tongue with the knife from his father's witchery bundle. It beling ill-luck to bring any part of a crow into a hut with the blood still in it, a small fire had been built outside, and Arnten sharpened a stick and thrust it into a slit cut in the spike of flesh, and propped it so that it would dry in the heat and smoke. "That was well-aimed," he said to Corm, and added "It was well-slung, too—" He accompanied his words with a gesture, and knocked over the stick, and the tongue was jarred loose. "This was not well-aimed," he said, stooping to pick it and the stick up, they both laughed, somehow Arnten took hold of the tongue first: this being so, he held it to insert the stick once more, but the tiny sliver of flesh was hotter than he had thought, and burned his fingers. Again they both laughed, and he thrust the burned fingers into his mouth.

As he cooled them with his spittle he heard the voices of children, though unusually clear and delicate, and un-

like the coarse tones which he associated with the voices of men-children. In another moment he heard one say, "*The eggling of the bear has cut out the corby's tongue!*" And another said, "*Night-colored one who flies in day, you will tell no more lies!*" and one said, "*Nor truths as bad as lies, Car- rion-diet!*"

Arnten looked up, half-astonished. "Who is that?" he asked.

"I see no one," said Corm.

Nor did Arnten, looking all around and fumbling with the stick: only two snow-birds. Even as he gazed at them, and all round the trodden snow of the lane, the birds took wing, and began to circle. And again he heard the beautifully clear children's voices; one saying, "*But the hatchling of the bear has acted too late, for the crow hath already told the wolf,*" and the other declaring, "*Ill hath he done in telling so, though ill doth he ever do: When the wolf meets the bear, beware!*"

"Nay, Corm," said Arnten, half-confused, half-alarmed, "did you not just now hear children talking?"

Corm said, "I heard nothing but the chirping and chattering of those twain snow-birds—"

"*When the wolf meets the bear, beware!*"

"Just now! Just now! Heard you not a child saying, *When the wolf meets the bear, beware!—!*"

"Often have I heard those words and more often of late than ever, Arnten," Corm said, looking pale again; "but—'just now?'—Again, just now, I heard nothing but the chattering and the chirping of that pair of snow-birds—"

Now the skin-flap door of the hut

was thrust aside, and the seamed face of Bab-uncle appeared. He asked what had happened, and was told, though the telling was confused . . . as were the tellers. Bab looked grave. "Where did you bury the crow-bird's head, then? he asked. Both boys looked at him in sudden guilt, shock—"You have not buried the head? But . . . at any rate . . . you did cut the head off, as the dream directed? Not that either . . . ?" He made a gesture, and at once set off to the crook-tree, and they with him. He made a single gesture more, seeing the splattered drops of blood upon the snow, and nought else. The tongueless crow was gone.

"The dream has been in part fulfilled," he said. "Let *that* at least be an omen of good for us . . ."

IV

ORFAS THE KING crouched huddled in his peltries upon his litterbed in the Room of Secret Counsel, his queen silent and watchful at his side, when a strangely faltering step was heard approaching. It could be no stranger, else had the mandrakes on guard all shrieked beshrew, but—

Merred-delfen staggered in, straightened, sank heavily to his accustomed place. "What doth ail thee, Merred-witch?" the queen asked, swift. And even the Orfas-king, for once forgetful of his iron and of himself, stretched forth a hand as if to offer aid, muttered, "Merred, Merred, what is this—?"

The chief witcher let drop the arm which, with its wide black sleeve, had shielded his face. His lord and lady

again besought his words. He shook his head, he flapped his blacksleeved arm. Then he opened wide his mouth. But no words came out.

Only blood.

CHAPTER TWO

DEEPER DRIFTED THE SNOW, deeper the miseries of the people. Piece by piece the emissaries of the king took iron, took amber, furs, took stores of food. Those who were slow to pay had their fires trampled out, or made sodden with the piddle of the tax-collectors. Sometimes those suspected—sometimes rightly, sometimes not—of withholding, concealing—had hands or feet thrust into the flames or embers; were left with only their burns for warmth. The four who dwelt in old Bab's hut (Corm finding it, although scant and crowded, better than his family's house, they liking not and cursing much his new-found friendships) heard the steps of the king's men going by; and though sometimes the pace of these steps did seem to alter somewhat, though the voices of the enforcers of tribute tended to drop at such times, still, at no time did any thrust a hand to draw aside the door-skin—let alone venture inside. The old man paid his hearth-fire tax, and the king's men took care (if not content) to let matters rest at that.

Within the hut, and amongst the four, the present paced slowly, hanging the future. It was agreed that they must leave, and in general they were in accord that their passage must be for the north. Nor was it the winter and its snows which deterred their going; if

the land were thus made harder of passing, less was the chance of pursuit, or even desire of pursuit. But as they depended much upon the presence of Roke, his skill and strength and vigorous manhood, so they could not leave till both strength and vigor were restored to him. The medicine and witchery of the Bab-wizard had helped keep Roke's breath within him when his bones were broke and his mind wandering, and constantly this same wizardry and wisdom helped him as he mended. But Bab dared not force the pace, and none dared force the Bab.

As for Arnten, although the walls of the hut were not as close as those of the mine-cells, still, he took not much pleasure in them. *The bear is in the blood . . .*

Now, as he walked abroad, in woods or within the palisaded village, he heard, almost as the echo of his footsteps: Bear: Bear. Bear: Bear. Where? There! There: Bear! And the taunt of other seasons was gone. Awe, there might be, or not. Perhaps respect, perhaps none. Sometimes, unsought: fear. Hatred? Also. By no means always. By no means. But . . . scorn? Contempt? Nevermore. He was now the weight, if not the height, of any full man; and solid all the way through. He did not walk quite as a man walked, toes down first or heels down first, but placing his sole down firmly and flatly. His eyes were fierce, and those few who met them and had scorned him as boy, as "bear's bastard," son of a mad mother and a father no one knew who, found the eyes by no means forgetful. Snow fell unheeded on his sleek head and shag breast and limbs. Mostly he

wore but one sole garment, and this was the folded skin of a bear. And it was sometimes said, of nights, and when mouth was pressed close to ear, that on occasion he would unfold the bearskin and crawl inside of it and then indeed go on all four limbs, snout swaying from side to side: *beware!*

Bear!

Bear!

Ware Bear!

But to no one did he say anything when he met them, him or her—though, were it her, his gaze might change somewhat, be less unseeing, less aloof. But he said no word. And he said no word when, quite suddenly, and without any alarm, save that two great clouds of birds swung circling back and forth, and some cried *Wolf!* and some sang *Ware!* and, whilst he had turned and with steady step, stalked towards his hut, —quite suddenly before he could reach it the streets were filled with king's men; and the multitude of them was like the swarming of lemmings: although lemmings do not carry spears, lemmings do not surround a man as they surrounded Arnten. They marched him, slowly, down the ways between the houses, houses in row after row, gaping and staring and low-murmuring people in row upon row. And in the great open place where the common-fire burned huddled all in wolf-skins, face all reddled as with the rust of dying iron, and in patches, angry, suffering, in pain, and half-mad . . . at least half . . .

This one bowed himself forward a half-bow, said, his voice by no means weak, though hollow—said, "Kinsman . . ."

A whisper went through the crowd, as a low wind goes through trees. And again the Orfas spoke: "Kinsman's son . . ." he said this time. Still Arnten said nothing. The frozen wind whipped round the arms and legs of his bear-skin, and the king seemed to observe, take note of this.

A third time he spoke. "Son of my half-brother's son"—again the murmur-whisper of the folk—Orfas drew back his meager lips and the folk hissed as he showed his teeth, whimpered as he rose a palm's breadth on his litter, cried, howled, howled, "*Bear . . .*"

Arnten said, "Wolf."

Abrupt, sat the king down. Silence for a moment. Said the king: "Withdraw the curse on iron."

Arnten said nothing. He knew he could no more withdraw the curse on iron than he could fly, but none would believe him; he could in no way better his case by denying he had that power: therefore if they would not believe, then let them fear. He was again a captive? No words denying his own puissance would free him. Therefore no words such would he utter.

Said the king: "See you not how the people suffer from not having iron weaponry to seek their meat? Curse me, your kinsman, as your father cursed me, having sought the kingship, too if you will, but no more curse *iron!*"

Arnten said nothing. He knew the king believed he held his father's might, knew the king believed Arnten's father had cursed iron to destroy the Orfas-king, to draw the teeth of the kingly wolf and leave him with rust alone when the Barbar-folk, armed

with weapons of iron in full good health, came sailing and came swarming across the All-Circling Sea. And Arnten knew that it is far better to be feared and hated without cause than to be scorned and condemned with or without cause. If Orfas was so far from full sharp of wits as to magnify, and publicly, one whom he might easily have privily had slain—

"Name what reward you will, and here, publicly, I vow you shall have it: *But withdraw the curse on iron!*"

Thick and croak overhead and some distance so, Arnten heard a raven mutter, "*The man-wolf, the iron-man, the rust-sick: weak . . .*" and in that instant he understood, he saw, he felt the strength of his knowledge within him: He thought, "I shall repeat those words, and so confound him—"

He opened his mouth, but, "Do you put on your wolf-skin and do I put on my bear skin, and let us then and thus contend: Half-brother of my father's father: *Is it wolf or is it only dog?*" were the words he said. And marveled at them, hearing.

No moan, no whisper, no hiss, no motion, movement, sign, from any there. Such words might pass between king and one about to die because of king; but by no other one dared they be even heard. Across the space between them he heard the dry sounds the king's mouth made. After a space of time he saw the king's face move, twitch, saw the king's hands clench upon his pelts. Saw a grinace cross the king's face and change into something which might have been a smile. King Orfas said, "Do you desire, then to don your bear skin? So. So. So. Be it so."

His blood roared in his ears as he slipped into his bear's skin. He heard the roaring of many waters and of many winds. He stood there, arms out as a bear's arms are out, saw though little caring, the king's mouth moving as the king spoke to his captains. He shambled between the houses of the men, not bothering to observe their awe-struck faces, not deigning to so much as growl at the company of the spearmen who surrounded him. Since it must be so, when it must be so, he would receive the spears as though they were porcupine quills, he would slay his score before he fell. For now—

The spearmen in front and at his side, who had been all the way stepping sidewise and scraping their off-feet after them, crabwise, now stopped, spears still pointing at him. He heard those behind him likewise halt. He had scarcely followed as to where they were going. Now he knew. Here was an old, old and stooping tree, some ways outside the palisade; beneath its roots with a cavity in which and round which generations of children had hid and played: but he had never cared, after once or twice, perhaps once alone and once not, to go there as a boy—it was called "the Bear Cave," perhaps had even been one, once, before the founders of the village had graven the first furrow and, casting down a woman in it, had furrowed her as well; thus establishing the place as one of human habitation, of crops and all things fertile. It was called "the Bear Cave," and no phrase containing the word "bear" had been very pleasant to his ears when it came from the lips of other children. And—

The spearmen, the King's men, all the King's party, had circled this stoop old tree about, and at a distance had begun to make camp-fires. Then up came the King, Orfas himself, carried in his litter-bed. They set it down. He said, "Bear." He said, "Some might say *bastard*, I say but *Bear*. You are indeed Bear? And son of the true Bear? So. Go. Go there. Into there. Down there. To the Bear Cave. It is midwinter, it is the time of the bearsleep. Die, then, Bear, Bear's Son, Curser of Iron. Die the Bear Death. Sleep the Bear Sleep. And as closely as the bearskin girds your body, so closely shall we gird and guard your hole, your grave, the pit from which you shall not emerge till the full winter-sleep be over: For do we but see your snout. Bear-kin, do we see so much as your shadow before the full measure of time be past: then we shall hunt you from your pit, Bear, take you from your skin, Bear; we shall see the Curser of Iron, bastard son of bastard blood, betrayer, slowly die, slower than iron dies, down, down, hunt him down . . ."

The orfas babbled and the Orfas raged and howled. One slow moment as the spearmen tensed, faces drawn, teeth fixed in lower lips, aslant their fearsome eyes begazed him, pale their faces though they so many and he but one; one slow moment only Arnten stood facing the black opening beneath the snowy ledge. He felt no anger, no rage, nor lust; felt no despair. He felt only lassitude . . . and . . . oh . . . it felt right. There he had to go. Sooner or later all men had thereunto to go.

With slow step, paying no further mind to the howling king or to the

silent folk, thinking of nothing but the inevitable and hence the welcome dark, he shambled forward, he entered into the open grave, he descended down into the pit, and thus to death.

II

DARKNESS AND DEEP TIME *and deep darkness and dark time* . . . Time knows not the darkness and the darkness knows not time. Yet time passes and the darkness, too. Pale yellow suns rolled round and round, and faintly the taste of honey. Ghostly fish leaped in silent streams. Darkness visible, shock ebbing away, and rest. And rest, rest . . . rest . . . warm in the darkness and the cold outside, the outside cold . . . ssswww . . . breath . . . ssswww . . .

Swans flying, long and melancholy their trumpet sounds. Elk. Elk trample through the breast-high snow. The hunting-cry of the great white ounce, the leopard of the snow. Deep in their nests the snow-white ermine lifted their heads. Somewhere in the snow, the ptarmigan, couching in cold, white upon white, lifted their wings and beat them as they rose upon the snowy air, like a flurry of snowflakes. Merred-delphin made signs to the Orfas-king. Pale as snow, the queen sat upright, alert, silent. Somewhere a milk-white hare made faint tracks in the soft white snow. "Yet another hour or so," muttered the Wolf-king. He was loath to show himself as yet. It was not his hour of the day.

Soon enough his hour would be. The dead bear would be dragged forth and flayed; flayed, the dead boy inside. Let all the people see, let all hope die

forever within them that any rule in all of Thule was to be expected save from the House of the Wolf. And then let the long-waiting, long-watching, long steadfast, -suffering guardians be released from watch and ward. And let them ravage, ravish, break, burn, and bare away. Let all of Thule take heed, let not for a single day, henceforth, suffer any pretender to the Vulpine Throne.

Merred-delphen made signs to King Orfas. The queen, too, turned her head. "What sounds are these?" she asked. Merred-delphen made signs to his liege and lord the king. "Sounds?" groaned the king? "What . . . ?" He lifted his head. Watched. Harkened. Many people were now coming? Who had summoned them? Who had given orders— Merred-delphin made signs, lifted hands before mouth. "What? Horn? Calling? Who gave orders? Sounding . . . what horn? No order did I give, and no horn have I heard. Only—" He lifted a hand for silence which did not altogether come, his face was strained, intent. "—only this wind do I hear, and—"

Wind, if wind it was, sounding very strange indeed. He scowled his bewilderment, his concentration. There were many things in that wind, indeed, and many images gathered suddenly in his mind in swift confusion. He seemed to hear the trumpeting of swans, and the bugling of elk, the coughing bark of the snow-white ounce; he seemed to see the ermine lifting their heads like serpents, amid flurries of snowflakes which were simultaneously snow-birds—"Out," he said, low-voiced, abrupt, more than merely urgent:

"out—out—have them take me out of this— *Out!* What delay is this? *Out* and *out*, or—"

Oh, how many of the folk were now there, standing in the snow! How the King's men turned their heads this way and that, unsure if they should maintain their attention as it had been all this while, or if their spearheads should now at once face the multitude of the townsfolk: and meanwhile and at the same time, what winds were these, what sounds, what witcheries—or—

The litter-bed of King Orfas came swiftly from his tent-house, and the bearers bore down in one straight line for the very center of the encircling guards and watchfires. The guardsmen closed in without present word or order round the figure of their lord. And the people closed in close all around the guards. And so they all—King and King's household and King's guards and King's subjects—closed in from all sides round about that old crook tree: and while the litter-bed of the King was but a few paces away therefrom, the snow at the base of the tree seemed to boil up from between the roots and in one second more, so swiftly that no eye saw the several steps which must have preceded it, there stood there confronting the King, gaunt but huge and with eyes blazing red with rage and arms upraised and talons poised to rake and with teeth and tusk bare to tear—

"*The bear!*" all voices cried aloud with one voice. Not dead, not dead, but risen living from the bear-death, returned hither from the depths below and from the Word of the Deads as ever year by year does the true bear.

"*The bear!*" rose one great cry from many throats. For the length of that first flurry in which snow fell up instead of down and for the length of that one shout "*The Bear!*" all stood as still as though painted on a hide: Bear: King: Kingsmen: Folk: Bear.

And then the scene dissolved into a thousand fragments, and some were fleeing and some had fallen, as though some had gone down into the snow to make obeisance as one does before a king, and as though some of sudden terror and fright had fallen dead; and there was blood, red blood, upon the trodden white blanket of the snow: but as to whose blood it was, or how it had been shed or who had shed it or why: none paused to ask or seek.

CHAPTER THREE

SOMETIMES THE HOWLING of wolves was heard, now nearer and now farther; sometimes the white elks lifted up their snowy heads and spoke to each other, drawing closer, but not fearfully, before any of the men could hear the other sounds. The white elk had been waiting for them in a wide bare place in the forest, a quarter-day's journey from the township, as the four of them fled: one bear-man, one dead-man, one witchery-man, and one for whom as yet no name had been devised, except the one already his—Corm.

"I had told the talleys in my talley-bag," said Bab Witch-uncle; "I counted the notches cut into other sticks by me. I watched the moon and the wheeling stars, and the angle of the sun's shadows day by day.

"But of course, not I alone did these

things. Orfas had powerful witchery in his own tent-house. My calculating showed that a good several days yet remained before we could or should suspect to see thee stir—"

Whisper after whisper, snow sliding from tree limb, snow falling from elk-hoof and -fetlock, snow blowing from one drift to another. "Thee might never have seen me stir at all," said Arnten, his mouth and face passing swiftly from wonder to grimness to gladness to wonder again; "had not Corm summoned me by All-Caller," and his eye and every eye went to the great fey horn, swinging in its cover-case of dull red leather gainst Corm's side.

Some tinge of that same color came to Corm's face. "It bade me do so," he said, almost faintly. "It spoke to me in clear tones by night and it murmured to me by day. But I feared . . . till that time just a while before the king and all his folk went rushing out, came a wind, a great wind rushing, and I heard the Horn say *Sound me!* and I heard the Bear say *Summon me!* . . .

"It seemed to me, as I lifted it, heavy and fearful to my lips, as I held it, fearful and heavy at my lips—it seemed to me as my lips trembled and my hands faltered and my fingers fumbled in trying to turn the setting so that I should summon and sound well and call aright—it seemed to me as first my breath sooned in it when first I wound that great fey horn, oh!—that I did hear all manner of creature of sea and air and land, and I struggled, lest I call them all—"

Roke rubbed one hand, which was still slow to full mending, and said, soft, "It is called by name, All-Caller."

"Surely thee called the Wolf," said Bab, "else why rushed he there so soon? But," seeing that Corm looked abashed, the dark old man, sunk and huddled in his many furs, reached out a hand all gloved in mitt and patted the youngest of the four. "But no matter, that: In fact, twas well, to that: twas good indeed and well indeed that the Wolf did see the triumph of the Bear. How so many folk fled so fast," the old witcher said, all in mild wonder, nowise gloating. And the snow-whispers sounded as he paused.

Roke rumbled, "And of full surety thee did call the elk. Who did ever see elk so near to mendwelling? Who did ever see even two white elk together, nay, and there we saw four! And who has ever heard, when twas not story-telling time, that elk should kncel for men to mount?"

Arnten's rumble, containing agreement without words, was deeper than Roke's. Out of the dark depths of the bear-sleep he had heard All-Caller, heard it as his father's voice: *Arnten! awake! Awake! The Wolf and Car-rion-Crow are at thee—awake! awake! Arise!* All the voices of the wildworld sounding simultaneously in his ears behind his father's voice, he hearing the sky-trumpet of the swans, the cough of the snowy ounce, wild horses screaming, the fury of the mammoth and the chirp and chatter of small bird and bark and bellow of sea-creature, morse and seal, which he had never heard before but knew, but knew—heard also, as though lying bare and in intended concealment, heard the hungry howl of a sick yet still-fierce wolf—

Heard no crow.

Swam up, in fury, through the snow, lashing out at those he had wearily bent before, before the time of and on the way to the bearsleep: they now in full terror before him. Some bleeding, torn. Some falling face-forward before him, spared. Some, shrieking, ran. Kingsmen and townsmen: some, shrieking, ran; some falling face forward very soon before him. He heard the shriek of a frightened hare, the whimper of a sore-sick wolf. Turned to find *Wolf*, turned to slay *Wolf*, saw three men neither fleeing nor falling face forward before him, reared up against them, teeth and claws bared: heard them cry, "*Bear! We be yours! Bear!*" Saw and heard one of them give one last blast on one great horn . . .

Heard no crow.

Muttered, now, leaning forward against the snow-soft neck of the elk, "My father said, '*Crow* . . .'" He looked up, and saw a hawk swoop, saw it flurry, feint and pounce in the flurry of snow, saw it pause a moment and then, having missed, begin its ascent again. He whistled, and it paused and hung in the soft grey air. "Saw you any crow, Swiftwings?" he called.

"Nay, no crow," the hawk shriek down to him. "All have gone, me think, to rob the granaries and skim the stinking midden-heaps of men. No skulk, black form defouls sky or land, O Get of the Bear."

"Tis well, Swiftwings." His deep rumble-voice declined into his deep chest, the others looking at him, Roke and Corm in awe, Bab nodding as at the but expected. League after league they paced swiftly through the snow,

the elk avoiding the deep-drifted places where even their nimble feet would flounder. "Tis well," he repeated. "No crow: no spy." They nodded, understanding now what the bird had said to him, and recollecting what he, Artenas-Arn-ten, had told them of what he had realized of the spyings of the crow; all fitting into place with what Bab had told them of Merred-Delphin, Corby-Merred, who had the crow for his medicine-creature: As Arn had the bear and Orfas the wolf.

It was wolf weather, but they heard, they saw no wolf. Only once were they sharply disturbed, in hastening at full pace towards their first destination, when, all slouching wearily against the necks of their elks towards the close of one day, Corm's head lolled and then snapped upright— At his cry they all were at once alert, and called out to him.

"Did no one see it? Did I alone see it? Did I dream?"

"Ask no more, but tell instead: what made thee cry out?"

He seemed slow, fearful, reluctant to speak of it. Then, "What said the hawk to thee, Bear? Said he indeed, *No crow—?*"

Artenas-Arnten, Bear-man, Son of the Bear, considered. His face still had somewhat of the gauntness which had marked his arise from foodless bearsleep, though he had eaten—it had seemed—full enough to make up for it. Perhaps it was but a certain sharpness which now lay upon him. His voice had deepened. He said, slow, "His word was, *Nay, no crow . . . No skulk, black form defouls sky or land*

... was his word to me. And now *your* word to me, Corm Hornbearer?"

Corm answered his question with another. "Is there . . . has any heard . . . ever . . . could there be such a thing . . . for there be indeed white elk and white leopard, and ermine and . . . could there indeed be such a thing as a white crow?"

No one answered. But no one's head lolled more. Each head gazed about, keenly at each snowy branch, slantly at each white-tufted treetop. And now and often each head was raised to try and pierce the secrets of the dull, concealing sky.

Only when they had paused, when the elk had found the sheltered and snowless side of some great thrust of rock, and knelt; only then, all dismounted and baggage laden off, twiggy branches gathered for resting place and small fire made; only when all had eaten and drunk the melted snow whose stale taste they now barely noticed, and sighed and composed themselves for sleep: only then did Bab speak.

"This time tomorrow should see us at Nainland," he said. And he said, "I trust that we shall be safe there."

II

THE FORGES of Nainland were cold.

Uür-tenakh-tenakh-Guür was greatly aged. His pelt was grizzled, his eyes, deep-sunken, seemed more often to gaze through them than at them. And, what Bab for one found most shocking, the old Nain slouched and swayed slightly back and forth before them, slouched so that the backs of his

knuckles rested on the ground. It was the openness of this stance which Bab found shocking, not the swaying, for many creatures swayed so at times. That Nains did sometimes rest and sometimes even walk, slouching, so, knuckles on the ground, all men did know. In fact, from this and this alone came the evil nickname of *Shamble-nain* which was sometimes shouted in their direction with much mocking imitation by children . . . when the Nains had certainly gone of out both eyesight and earshot. But it was unknown that Nains or any Nain would willingly act thus in the presence of men, for they were, it was thought, as sensitive on this as the Painted Men were being seen with skin unpainted.

"The forges of Nainland are cold," murmured Uür-tenakh-ten-akh-Guür. "Some say, *Forge cold iron, then—fools! Forge cold iron, then—fools! Men-fools*, saying, *Forge cold iron, then . . . Spies of Orfas, Eyes and Ears of Wolf-as-King . . .*

"—But you are safe here," said Uür-tenakh-tenakh-Guür, in the moment when Artenas was certain that the old Chief Smith did not see them at all, nor clearly wit that they were there. "You are safe enough here," he said, clearly enough, looking at them full wittingly, though unsurprised. The sight of him, the Nain-burr in his voice, the strong old smell of him, for a moment Artenas felt himself begin to sway, was borne back in memory to his vile prisonment in the Wolf-king's mines, smelled the burning of the bracken-fern which had been their sole bed, heard his father roaring as he held off the guards, having dropped him,

then Arnten only, through the long scraped-at scape hole to safety—he, for at least one more minute or two still only Arnten, the Son of the Bear. He stilled himself. He was Arntenas-Arnten now: in the Old Tongue, in the witchery-language, Bear-Man-Son-of-the-Bear. Or, merely—he himself was now Arn. Bear.

"Bear dies, iron dies," muttered the aged smithy-Chief. "Iron dying, Wolf dying. Bear sleeps death-sleep, so must iron sleep. Bear comes to life, so must iron. One queen is every queen.

"Lion, tiger, wolf and bear,

Bee and salmon, mole and hare."

They shift their shapes . . . Mayhap Nains be dying, too. Uür-tenakh-tenakh-Guür is cold. The forges of Nainland are cold." He muttered something in the Old Language, in the Witchery Tongue. Old Bab murmured something back. "Could thee vision such a thing?" the old man of the Nain-forges asked his silent guests, swaying, caring not, on his knuckles. "I had never dreamed to see it, even, nor thought it could be seen. Smooth-skins! Know'st thee all what I tells thee?" He quite suddenly shambled forward, they stepped back and away, he raised his hands and spread his palms and gestured them to go out before him and he followed, they hearing the never-before-heard-by-them sound of a creature of the sort who walks on two limbs now padding along on four. A moment more and they stood on the threshold of his lair. It seemed as though something at that moment had pierced the sky, the cold sun perhaps, for the day grew sudden bright and before them they saw,

spread out over all as far as they could see, the stone tables all blackened with fire which were the forges which had once supplied all Thule with iron, whose fires and whose smokes were proverbial, the sounds of which were fabled. The forges of Nainland lay before them, where once was beaten out all the iron-work of Thule.

"No fire," crooned Uür-tenakh-tenakh-Guür; "no smoke, no hammering. No sough, no blast. The hearths and hearts of Nainland have ceased to beat. The forges of Nainland are cold, are cold.

"The forges of Nainland are cold . . ."

III

BUT STILL FIRES SMOLDERED, as though too cast down to blaze, on the inner hearths; and the ancient seemed—perhaps only seemed—younger, healthier, quicker, sounder, keener, as they all of them crouched with him, with him and some several other Nains. Arntenas had told them what he could of their kinsmen toiling in the quickeningly futile labor of the mines of iron round about which Orfas King had built his prison walls. Nainthralls . . . the word came not easy to their mouths, mostly they growled it low, in their throats and chests. And they growled, sighed, when he repeated to them some few parts of the songs the nainthralls sang, as it had been translated to him, sang as they toiled, slow dirge-like chanting: Once the Nains were free as swans, and the Nains see it . . .

"Or did they think it truly, not thinking me to be a fool, but being

only fools themselves? *'Forge cold iron, then? Why—*Were the smallest hammer in all Nainland to beat one stroke on the smallest forge, Orfas would hear it, Orfas would say in his wolfish heart, *'They Nains have tricked me!'* Did he not threat me he would come here with all his company of spearsmen? Some say to fear he not, but I say: Fear all Smoothskins, walk lightly through all their lands, but make no smallest move which might make them walk through Nainland.

"Bear! What now?"

"This I hoped to hear from thee, Grandfather."

"Why? How? Why?"

"Some had said so."

"What else, some had said?"

Arntenas paused, mused. Then, "Feed the Wizards," he repeated. A great sigh, a groaning, moaning, like some odd wind, and in the dimlight the thick bodies of the Nains swayed like a grove of great trees sway in the wind: not much, not much at all: but perceptibly. Uür-tenakh-tenakh-Guür gazed at the fire, his face now seemed greedy, he grunted a word, fire was built higher. He spread his nostrils wide, as though grateful even for the scent of smoke. Someone among the Nains had picked up a stone, and gave it a crack against the stone seats on which they all sat or crouched. And another. Another. It was not, then, a forgestone, and no one needed fear that the spies called the King's Ears would hear it; but it beat a slow forge-rhythm and as it beat and as the Nains swayed in the shadow and the smoke, the aged Chief of all their Smiths beat his fists upon his knees, and, beating, spoke.

He told them that iron was a living thing which grew in the ground, which breathed and sweated, that fire opened the pores of iron and that water closed them. Every wood has its witch, and every metal, too, that sometimes one entered the other . . . by breath, by mouth, by pores, or— That (though this they knew) that Nains could see the pores opening in fiery iron, as they could see them close when quenched in water; whilst men could see neither; just as Nains could see a sundry multitude of patterns as iron lay gasping in the hot embrace of the fire, knew how to work it, taking note of these patterns and particles. The nain-sense of such things was part of naincraft, of nainlore. Of witchery.

True, admitted the old smith, Nains could not indeed walk in the fire as could the salamander, though, true, he stated simply, nains could hold iron far, far hotter than ever men could do. The old, deep-sunk eye glowed redly, no more mere amber.

"Past the forests and the heaths which are past Nainland, lie the Paar Marches, and past them are the Death Marshes, and past them are the Great Glens where the Wizards have their Deep Caves: but seldom has any dared go that way, for the airs of the marshes and the airs of the caves are alike intermittently foul and often deadly. It is when lightning strikes these thick murk mists that dragons are engendered. And as to what use these dragons may be put, these are not the concern of either Nains or Perries or of men, and certainly not of the gross Barbar-folk who come a prowling, at times a-prowling, o'er the All-Circling

Sea . . .” Uür-tenakh-tenakh-Guür’s voice had fallen into something not unlike the story-teller’s chant, the tale-tellers’ mode: Arntenas recalled things his uncle had used to tell round the fire hearths as the snow-daemons howled and prowled, of werewhales and tree-tigers and the bewitchments of the Painted Men whose skin must not be seen; he shuddered, recalling his own single encounter with one such; the memory as well as the old Nain’s words bringing swift reflection on Perries; but this swiftly went from him as he attended closely and heard one by one the other Nains join in and their voices sink into Deep Chant of the Divine and Dying Bear, who descends into death each winter and arises from his grave whilst still the earth in which his grave was made lies still locked strong in death . . .

And then they had gone on to something else, he heard them intoning, *“By three things a king is made. By strength, by witchery and by fortune.”* Had he not heard this before? Twas naintalk. No nearer to his destination did it bring him. But . . . *“By three things is a king unmade. By fortune, by witchery, by strength.”* He sighed. Less than a year ago he was a child, eating offals, glad for bones: now he sat by the hearthfire of the Nains. Let him, then, listen, bide his time, hold up his head, hearken well. Yet still his head drooped. Then it snapped up.

“First comes All-Caller, the Great Fey Horn,” the old Nain held the syllables in his mouth as though reluctant to release them. “Next comes True Iron. True Iron casts out False. Next comes Fireborn, firstborn Son of Fire.

Fireborn hews False Iron into pieces. All is known to the Wizards, but the Wizards are known to few or none. The Nains know iron, more ever than Men do know Iron, much more do the Nains know.

“But there be things which e’en the Nains know not, e’en of Iron: and these do the wizards know. And if their mouths be closed there is that which will make them open . . . food will make them open . . .”

In his narratings he brought them now safe past the Death Marshes and into Wizardland, and told how there was neither game nor fish in Wizardland, neither grew there any plant for food. So had the Wizards learned to go one hundred years upon one single meal, yet they can go no longer. They cannot be said to live. But neither dare one call them “dead.” And at this Uür-tenakh-tenakh-Guür slowly swung his shag old body and moved his great head upon its stiff neck and looked full at Arntenas Arnten. And the chanting died away. And only the old Nain was heard.

“Who else, not in Wizardland—who else, not a Wizard, has in sooth and in truth gone longer without taking food, taking drink, than any Nain or simple man? If not an hundred years, then one third of one hundred days, and several days more—? The Bear. The Bear. In sooth and in truth. The Bear. One has heard that the Wizards know the reason for the death of iron. One has heard this whispered in the snows and heard it in the winds, and one may have seen it also in the stars. It may not be so. Not all one hears is so. But it may be so. It may be worth

the striving and the risk. To go into the Great Glens to seek the Wizards is by no means to go to certain death, else none had returned by whose accounts we have reason and kenning to speak. Let he who has gone long without eating go and feed those who may have gone by now even longer without eating; and let him not go quite alone, and let him bring them a meal of liver and fat and marrow spread on a clean piece of bark and sprinkled with clean sea-salt.

"And let him ask. Then let him ask. And then let him ask about the death of iron. And, ah, and, O! Let him hearken and listen well, so well." His voice sank, sank, sank. *"For the forges of Nainland are cold . . ."*

CHAPTER FOUR

AS HIS COMPANY was now increased to five, himself included, Arn-bear had thought that perhaps he might find five elk waiting when it came time to move on. It was wry, how each of the first four in turn made as if to offer his own place as elk-rider to the new companion, and how each in turn, after a longer look, gave up the notion. Something in the new one's look seemed clearly to say the offer was not needed, would be better not made.

It seemed to them that he was young, as well as such things might be estimated of Nains. To say that he seemed strong is to say that he seemed a Nain. His broad back was well-packed with store of the increasingly scant supply which Nainland had to offer, and yet Nainland had given of that supply to the other four as well.

And in one vast hand he held a silex, the Nain weapon of ancientmost legend, antedating even that bronze-metal which had died of the greensickness long and long ago: hewn of glittering quartz-flint: knife, with his own hand as handle—axe, with his long enormous arm as axe-half.

Uür-tenakh-tenakh-Guür was as they first saw him, now as they were to see him last: slightly swaying as he stood and leaned upon the backs of his hand-knuckles, and his eyes were but dull amber eyes in the light of the pale, cold day. But other Nains there were who spoke, though he was silent. "Have you ever seen a like to this, then, Bear?" asked one of these, holding up a piece of hide, cured well. Arn knit his shag brows, his face saying plainly that he kenned not the question: what, had he ever seen the like before to a piece of hide, well-cured?

Something which might have been the husk of a laugh, if Nains laughed, rattled in the Nain's chest. He brought the piece of well-cured hide closer. For a moment still frowning, Arn looked closely at it, though the frown had already begun to melt in the awareness that there was no nonsense here. And then it was as though the piece of hide spoke to him. Frown vanished in a look of enlightenment which was joy. He reached for the hide's other end.

"Surely this green mark which turns and turns like a snake is no snake, nor even eel," he said; "but surely—here, for here I see it be marked with a fish!—surely this be river?"

"It does be river," said the Nain.

"And here there is a, oh it is like a medicine-picture, a witchery-mark,

yet not: hills. These be hills, and the river winds down the hills . . ."

"The river does wind down the hills," the Nain agreed.

Most of the pictures, marks, symbols, Arn grasped himself. A few had to be explained to him. He did not know the sign for Wizard. "Though I should surely in time have scanned that out," he said, with dignity. Arn was often straight with dignity those days.

"Surely in time," the Nain agreed.

"This is a pretty device, this . . . map?—this map," he went on: and then his sense overweighed even his dignity, and he said, "I wish that I had had one sooner," he said, slowly. Then, very quickly, "Had I, then might I have found my father sooner, and been more with him whenas we were free." Something burned in his throat: the smell of burning bracken, the smell of guard-torches. Something burned in his eyes, too.

The Nain said, "The bear were friend a-we," dropping into his common speech, as though somehow embracing and including and understanding. Then, as before: "We cannot be sure of all painted here. Perhaps if you find something wrong, or something not on here—"

"I will paint it so."

There was no farewell. The Nain-companion had already moved away in his rolling Nain-gate, and they let him get a way off before they mounted and went as he went. He would see them through Nainland.

No palisades marked the settlements of Nainland, only the deepset Nain-lairs and here and there dark-stained places where charcoal had been

burned, and thin lines of smokes from the lairs. And here and there a Nain returning, usually empty-handed, from a search for food, making deep tracks in the snow. And, by every settlement, by every group of lairs, the blackened stone tables which were the Nain-forges.

And each such place seemed to echo with the lament of Uür-tenakh-tenakh-Guür: *The forges of Nainland are cold . . . are cold . . .*

"The forges of Nainland are cold . . ."

II

ARN NOTICED that his elk had stopped. and the others as well. He wondered if it were time for food, or a fire, or—His mind had been far away. He looked around and saw the young Nain at his side, and now, for the first time, this one spoke. "I have never been past here," he said.

Arn blinked, cleared his eyes. A different kind of landscape lay ahead of him, very flat, and thinly covered with a different kind of trees, strange and tall and twisted pines, with black needles free of snow. "This is the end of Nainland, then," he said. Not asking.

His new companion gave the deep click which was the Nain assent. "Here begins the Paar Marches," he said.

"Mark where the sun now stands," Arn said, "and so: straight on." For a while he strained to think what different sound there was, then it came to him that what was different was the absence of a sound he had grown used to during the earlier part of the journey. The snow did not whisper any longer. There lay none on the twisted

tall pine trees, none shifted with the wind, there was no wind. And none fell whispering from the feet and fetlocks of the elk.

The Nain watched him as he leaned far over, holding the elk about the neck, and grasped up a handful of snow; then did the same. "It seems wetter," Arn said. "Heavier . . ."

"Twill soon melt," said the Nain. And soon melt it did, for every day the sun was somewhat longer with them and no fresh snow fell. The pines grew blacker and blacker and thicker and thicker upon the flat ground. They saw fewer living things, for no grass grows, snow or no snow, where the pine needles fall full thick. No deer pawed for browse, no tracks were seen, save only here and there the light ones of a bird. Mostly the pines were bare of limbs till far from the ground, but presently they came to one so bent and gnarled that it was fair easy for Arn to climb. He had grown uneasy at having no hills from which to look about.

Still the land was flat and nothing new did he see, till turning to scan the last fourth of the landscape, he observed smoke, and a thick smoke, so that at first he thought the forest was afire, or the grass: then realized it could be neither at this season: and next he saw that it did not act as smoke did, somehow. So he considered that it must be mist. And so considering, descended, very thoughtfully indeed. Tall Roke looked wistfully at him, still too stiff to be mounting trees. Arn said, "That way lie the Marshes."

Their faces grew grim at this. Then Corm said, "Well, we must pass what we do not want to come whither we

do." He let his fingers rest a moment lightly upon the case which carried All-Caller. Then he smiled, though it was a thin, pale smile.

Roke said, "Always I heard, 'A-well, a man dies once only,' and damn-fool word I thought it then. But now I find it a great comfort, for, having already died once . . ."

Bab rubbed his hands gently upon the elk he rode. "It is a time yet," he said, "before we are to meet the Marshes. And I do not think that the marshes will go from their place to meet us before time."

Arn mounted again. "I saw no crows," he said. And thought to himself that 'twould be fortunate indeed if he saw nothing worse. The air grew warmer, flatter, staler, the snow thinner, and finally vanished after some miles of a thin, bubbly skim which lay upon the ground, neither snow nor frost nor ice. They eyed this, all, with mistrust, fearful that its end meant mud, that mud meant marsh; but the ground still stayed hard and firm. The trees were now less tall but, as though to make up for that, were thicker, both on the ground and round about each twisty boll. And black as ever. Next it came about that they could see the mists without having to climb, and he who climbed next (twas Corm) returned to flat land paler than before and announced that there was now mist afar off to another side as well. And so, as though at its own pace, slowly the marshes came to meet them.

They still walked on firm ground, but this had shrunk so that it seemed a road; there were still trees to either side, but they were now canted at odd

and painful angles and sunken in pools of dirty, sluggish mist, which now and then cleared away to reveal pools of sluggish, dirty water. The trees seemed to be drowning, struggling and writhing in anguish to keep above the filthy and murderous surface of the marsh.

And next it seemed that they could hear them drowning, a thick, panting, bubbling noise, from behind the squalid mists; a hissing and a squelching sound, and then other sorts of sounds, of which not all were describable and all were horrid. Then horror slid out of the mists, it seemed to slide towards them without actually moving, then it stepped out of the mists and walking on its now visible feet swift and stiff-legged it opened horrid jaws and hissed and rushed upon the Nain, who was as was his custom walking first. He cast his flint at it and they heard the blow and saw the sleek grinning serpent-head yield a bit and bleed a bit and hiss more and show teeth, but still it came on swift and stiff-legged and the head came down and the Nain leaped up, how beyond all speech the wonder of that leap! Catching with each hand the horrid lip on the underjaw on each side, the Nain—and the horror which had come out of the mist began to make croaking noises quite dreadful and dismaying to hear, tossed its head and again, trying to shake off this prey which would become prey, tried to reach it with one great claw-foot and slipped and tried again and brought the grom slant head down close to the ground and raked the Nain with its talons and Arn seized the flint-quartz and struck where he saw two bones that moment outlined between head and

back, and struck again and again and struck again and felt the talons ripping at his own body and saw the slant head and its rolling serpent-eye and stinking teeth, and slid and slid and struggled for balance and slipped and then was down and the head of teeth dived at him and then had vanished and then as though hands had been plucked from his ears he heard everyone screaming, shouting, the earth quagged and trembled and he slid into the marsh and he caught a glimpse of the head again.

Everything stopped there. Everything stopped then. Very slowly then he climbed out of the marsh. Something was thrashing about hugely and heavily and gouts of mud and blood and water fell all about. This was not well, so Arn walked away from it and he saw his uncle lying on one arm and watching the thrashing and he, Arn, very respectfully and without urgency helped his uncle up and they went on their way. The next thing they saw was really droll, and that was Roke and Corm and the Nain all on their knees and scrambling in the muddy road and in the pools of blood and water for the great piece of flint, and it a-most seemed that they might fight over it. And this would not be well.

Arn said, "This is not well, Roke and Corm. The flint is the Nain's."

So Roke and Corm ceased grappling and grasping and the Nain alone reached and took it and grumbled and said, muttering, "It is filthy." Then he slowly arose with it in his hand and looked about him, hand poised to strike. He blinked. Everything was almost silent now. There was a splash.

After a long while, another splash. After a long while, another splash. Slowly, they all gathered round the Nain and looked. Something rather like a huge fish or eel or perhaps snake came slowly up out of the water on one side and slowly fell into the water on the other . . . with a splash. It lay there. Then it began to rise. Then the Nain stepped forward, and as though trained as a team the other four stepped beside him, step—step—step— But there was nothing more for a long while. And after a long while the mists parted and they saw the horror lying quite twisted and broken across the ridge of dry land.

"Be get us gone," someone muttered. "Do it have a mate—"

The Bab said, in a voice which now for the first time sounded old and tired, said, quite calmly, "At this season of the year no such creature has a mate.

"Still," he added, as though considering a rather nice point, "Still, I see no why to linger."

But linger they did, and the Nain gave over his flint to Roke and Roke proceeded to skin the dead beast, and to cut the skin into managable pieces which they wrapped wet side inside and bound about with strips of the same. Then they went on. Gradually the road (as they had come to think of it) widened and the marshes retreated, with their drowning trees and strange bubbling and other sounds. It is true that not all of the party quite shared Bab's belief that the great (Corm called it "dragon") swamp beast had no current mate, and Roke muttered there might be others lurking, even if not related at all. They watched

carefully and looked over their shoulders till long after the last mists had died away.

III

THE COUNTRY the other side of the Death Marshes had no particular name; it was very much like their own country in the south of Thule, save that it seemed to have no menfolk dwelling in it, and their companion said that there were no Nains there, either. He had considerably abated the withdrawn manner which had seemed habitual to him at first: when you have all been slithering in the muck and trying to escape dragon's teeth and claws, there seems little reason not to: and he at length informed them, with a hint of a shaggy smile, that his name was Eër-derred-derred-Eër.

As for the elk, witchery-summoned to their aid or not, they had fled at first sight or sound or perhaps scent of the swamp-monitor, and for true, no one blamed them. It was heavier work walking and carrying their gear, scant though it was, but the increasing geniality of the weather made up for much. The long, cold hand of winter was relaxed from their throats, and they all felt easier. They had eaten their winter rations without much knowing how long it would be before they got more, and in any event it had been eat or perish. And now game was seen again, and green shoots to chew on; and there were fish in the streams. One by one the streams flowed into larger streams, and one day, there before them was the river of the hide map.

There before them was clean water

running deeper than they had long seen, and they looked at each other and they laughed to see how dirty they all were. Roke declared that mere washing in water was not enough, and he set to a-building of a hut for steam-baths, Corm helping him. Corm was certainly more at home with witchery than before, but a steam-bath was a familiar thing, and perhaps in acknowledging how much he had missed it he was admitting how much he had missed other familiar things. He too had left boyhood behind him, and a soft down had begun to creep along his cheeks.

While Roke muttered fussily as he put the ridged-crown on the small hut and Corm gathered wood and stones to heat in the fire, Eär-derred-deered-Eär had selected a spot in the water which came breast-high when he sat in it, and he sat in it and bobbed himself back and forth, going under each time, coming up bubbling and burbling and spouting like some strange sea-creature. Arn looked and laughed, cast his clothes at the brim, walked in until he felt the waves tickling his ribs, and then gave a whoop and dived forward. He swam and floated and dived and whooped and did some spouting of his own, and it was as he gave a spectacular spout and turned over on his side that he saw the woman in the pool.

HE FELT THE SUN warm upon his skin and he observed her standing in the shadow of the birch trees, a faint calm smile she wore, and her naked flesh shone silvery in the dappled light. It was the easiest thing to swim over to her and to stand beside her under the shade of the birches, dappled with the

same light, and to smile on her. Suddenly there was a flash and before he could so much as blink, she had gone, but he saw her under the water, her figure oddly distorted but still gleaming and flashing; and he dived after her.

Long, long they dallied and played in that river, chasing and pursuing one the other, each the other, and she showed no fright as he first touched her. He felt so many things. She was new, and had seemed so rightly to have become a new companion. She was so fair and beautiful, and he hungered after beauty more than he ever knew or would ever till long later know. And there was more, so much more that he felt, and barely realized. And he followed her and swam side by side with her, and presently he observed without alarm that others were in the water with them, like her, enough to have been her full sibs. So, then, the land was—or, smiling to himself as he coned the thought—at least the river was not after all without inhabitants.

They seemed not alarmed by his being so different from them, so rough, so much pelt, and they all so smooth and silvery. They smiled her same calm faint smile, swam slow circles round and round about them, he and she. There seemed some faint disturbance in the water . . . in the air . . . he heard and felt a wind start up, heard suddenly a multitude of sounds . . . looked up, looked back, saw with a slow coldness in his loins and limbs that they were all quite close to him, they were almost touching him, they seemed about to dash at him, they were not smiling now and they were changed, greatly all were changed and yet clearly still he recog-

(Continued on page 71)

THE WITCH OF THE MISTS

by **L. SPRAGUE
DE CAMP** and
LIN CARTER

Illustrator ROLAND

The Conan Phenomenon was slow a-building throughout the thirties, forties and fifties, marked by a few spurts of publishing (a book or two from a specialty publisher, the early Ace Double, a few post-Howard stories in Fantastic Universe magazine) and long gaps between. In the late sixties, however, Lancer Books began an ambitious program to bring all the Conan saga into print, under the direction of L. Sprague de Camp and Lin Carter. Carter and de Camp also collaborated, both with each other and posthumously with Howard, who had left eight unfinished stories at his death, to bring the series to a satisfying conclusion. (For a short biography of Robert E. Howard himself, see de Camp's "Skald in the Post Oaks," FANTAS-



TIC, June 1971.) *The story which follows is a new collaboration between de Camp and Carter, set in Conan's later years as a father as well as warrior-king. It is the first of four planned novelettes which will be published, eventually, as Conan of Aquilonia, volume eleven of twelve.*

1. THE THING THAT FLED

THE SUN, HIDDEN by the heavy overcast, was nearing the western horizon. Above the clearing, the clouded sky hung like a rumpled blanket of dingy wool. Clammy tendrils of vapor slithered like wandering ghosts between the wet black tree trunks. Drizzle from the recent rain still pattered down upon the drifts of fallen autumn leaves, whose bright scarlet and gold and bronze were fading to brown like the dying light.

With a muffled thudding of hoofs, a creak of leather, and a clank of accouterments, a great black stallion burst into the gloom-shrouded mead. Fog boiled up before his plunging hoofs and parted to reveal a broad-shouldered giant on the huge horse's back, his powerful legs clamped about the beast's barrel. The man was no longer young, for Time had touched with gray the square-cut black mane and the heavy black mustache that swept fiercely out from either side of his grim, tight-lipped mouth. Years had cut deep lines about his jaw. His dark, heavy-featured, square-jawed face and thickly corded forearms showed the seams and scars of many brawls and

battles, but his firm seat in the saddle and alert, brisk bearing belied his years.

For a long moment, the huge man sat motionless on the panting, lathered stallion. From under the brim of a sweat-stained forester's felt hat, he raked the foggy clearing with a searching gaze and muttered a sulphurous oath.

Had any eye observed him, the watcher might well have mistaken the swarthy giant for some woodland brigand—until he noticed that the heavy broadsword at his side bore in its pommel a jewel worth a knight's ransom, and the hunting horn that hung over his back was of ivory decorated with gold and silver filagree. He was, in fact, the king of Aquilonia, unchallenged ruler of the wealthiest and most powerful realm of the West. His name was Conan.

Again he scanned the mist-cloaked clearing with his fiery gaze. In the dimming light, not even he could read the signs of recent hoof prints in the wet tangle of grasses, even though twigs were broken and fallen leaves disarranged.

Conan tugged at the sling of the horn and raised the instrument to his lips to blow the recheat, when the sound of hoofbeats came to his ears. Presently a gray mare shouldered through the bushes that ringed the clearing. A man of mature years but younger than Conan, with glossy black hair and flashing black eyes in a swarthy visage, rode out of the forest and saluted the king with easy familiarity.

At the first snap of a twig, Conan's hand had instinctively flashed to his

hilt. Although he had no reason to fear ill will in this great, gloomy forest northeast of Tanasul, the habits of a lifetime were not easily broken. Then, seeing that the newcomer was one of his oldest comrades and staunchest supporters, he relaxed a trifle. The younger man spoke:

"No sign of the prince back along the trail, sire. Is't possible the lad has ridden ahead on the trail of the white stag?"

"'Tis more than possible, Prospero," growled Conan. "The foolish cub has inherited more than his share of his sire's thickheadedness. 'Twill serve him right if he's benighted in the woods, especially if the damned rains begin again!"

Prospero, the Poitanian general of Conan's armies, politely masked a grin. The burly Cimmerian adventurer had risen, by chance or fate or some wild whim of his northland god, to the throne of the most brilliant and sophisticated kingdom of the West. He still had the explosive temper and unruly ways of his primitive people; and his son, the missing Prince Conn, was growing into the very image of his father. The boy had the same surly, grim-jawed face, coarse black hair, swelling thews—and the same reckless contempt of danger.

"Shall I summon the rest of the party, sire?" said Prospero. "'Twere not good to let the heir to the throne be lost in the woods overnight. We can spread out, sounding our horns—"

Conan considered, chewing his mustache. About them stretched the gloomy forests of eastern Gunderland. Few knew the paths of these untamed

woods. From the look of the clouds, the nightly rains of an early fall would soon be upon them, drenching the primeval wilderness with a cold, relentless downpour. Then the king laughed shortly.

"Forget it, man! We'll account this part of the lad's education. If he be of the stuff of kings, a little wetting and a sleepless night will hurt him little and may teach him something. Why, when I was the cub's age, many were the black nights I spent on the naked fells and in the wooded draws of the Cimmerian hills, under the glitter of the stars. Let's get back to camp. We lost the stag, but we have the boar, and those skins of the good red wine of Poitain will go well with roast pork. I am nigh starved!"

HOURS LATER, his belly filled and his spirits lifted by many a draught of wine, Conan sprawled before a snapping fire in the rude camp. Wrapped in a pile of skins, somewhat the worse for wine, the stout Guilaime, baron of Imirus, snored lustily. A few huntsmen and courtiers, wearied from a hard day of hunting, had also taken to their rough beds. A few yet lingered beside the steaming fire.

The clouds had broken, and a wintry moon, nearly full, glared whitely down through scattering mists. The rains had not begun again, and with the sky's clearing had come a brisk, cold wind, tearing autumnal leaves from their branches.

Wine had loosened the King's tongue, so that he held forth, his face brooding and flushed in the flicker of firelight. Bawdy jests and anecdotes

from his long career of wild adventure poured from him. But Prospero noticed that, from time to time, Conan broke off, silencing the others with a lifted hand, to listen for distant hoofbeats or to probe the darkness of the gloomy forests with keen glances from his deep-set eyes of volcanic blue. Conan was plainly more worried over Prince Conn's failure to return than his words suggested. It was all very well to shrug it off, saying the experience would do the half-grown boy some good. But to pretend indifference, when the twelve-year-old lad might be lying under a wet bush with a broken leg amidst the black night, was another matter.

Prospero reflected that Conan might well be feeling the pangs of guilt—a rare thing for the wild, brawling, half-civilized Cimmerian warrior-king. The hunting trip into northern Gunderland had been Conan's idea. His queen, Zenobia, had fallen ill after long labor, giving birth to their third child, a daughter. During the slow months of her recovery, Conan had been with her as much of the time as he could afford from his royal duties. Feeling neglected, the boy had become surly and withdrawn. Now that Zenobia had regained much of her strength and Death had seemingly withdrawn his dark wings from the palace, Conan had suggested a few weeks of camping and hunting together, hoping to find a new closeness to his son.

And now the headstrong boy, wild with the excitement of his first grown-up hunt, had ridden off alone into the gathering darkness of the unknown forest in crazy pursuit of the elusive

snow-white stag they had vainly chased for hours.

As the sky cleared, discovering the glittering stars, the rising wind whined in the boughs and dry leaves rustled as if to the tread of stealthy feet. Conan again broke off amidst a wild tale of sorcery and pirate life to search the gloom with probing eyes. The great Gunderland wood was not the safest place, even in this turbulent age. Bison and aurochs, wild boar, brown bear, and gray wolf stalked the woodland paths. And there lurked another potential enemy as well: the most cunning and treacherous of all foes—man. For rogues, thieves, and renegades took to the wilds when city life became too dangerous for them.

Snarling an oath, the king came to his feet, doffing his black cloak and tossing it on his pile of duffel.

"Call me woman-hearted if you dare, you bastards," he growled, "but I'll sit here no longer. With this moon as bright as day, I can follow a trail or I'm a Stygian. Fulk! Saddle up red Ymir for me; the black's winded. You men! Pass the wineskin one last time around and saddle up. Sir Valens! You'll find the torches in the third wagon. Distribute them, and let's forth. I'll not sleep easy till I know my boy is safe."

Swinging astride the big roan, Conan muttered: "That unlicked cub, haring off like a jackass after a stag that could outrun two ponies like his! When I find him, I'll teach him to make me leave a nice warm fire for the cold wet woods!"

A snow-white owl floated across the gibbous moon. Conan choked off his

curse with a sudden shiver. A black foreboding swept his barbaric soul. His backward people whispered strange tales of a thing that fled in the night—a were-stag, ghostly white and swift as the winter wind. Pray Crom that this was a beast of normal flesh and blood and not some uncanny thing from nighted gulfs beyond space and time...

2. THE FACELESS MEN

YOUNG CONN WAS COLD and wet and weary. The insides of his thighs were chafed from hours of hard riding, and he had developed more than a few blisters. He was also conscious of a growling emptiness where his stomach should be. Worst of all, he was lost.

The white stag had floated ahead of him like a ghostly bird, glimmering against the darkness. The elusive brute had come almost within spear-shot a dozen times. Each time that cool caution overcame Conn's excitement, the magnificent stag had faltered, proud antlers drooping, as if it had reached the edge of its endurance. And each time the vision of bearing so splendid a prize back to his father had spurred the boy on just a little farther.

The boy reined his panting pony to a halt amidst thick bushes and stared around through the dense gloom. Boughs creaked and leaves whispered above him under the rush of the wind, and foliage blotted out stars and moon alike. He had not the faintest idea of where he was, nor of the direction in which the white stag had led him, except that he knew he had strayed far beyond the bounds his father had set. The boy shivered a little in his leather

jerkin. He knew his father's temper; he would be beaten with a heavy belt when he came limping back. The only thing that might mitigate Conan's anger would be for Conn to return triumphant, to throw the great stag at the feet of the king.

Conn shrugged off his fatigue and hunger and set his square jaw with boyish determination. At that instant he bore a striking likeness to his mighty sire: the same tanned, frowning visage, framed in straight, coarse black hair: the same smouldering blue eyes, deep chest, and broad shoulders. Only twelve, he looked likely to match his father's towering height when he came of age, for already he was taller than many Aquilonian grown men.

"Up, Marduk!" he said, thumping his heels in the ribs of the black pony. They shouldered through the wet, dripping boughs into a long grassy glade. As they entered the open place, young Conn glimpsed a flash of white against the gloom. The great white stag came floating out of the darkness, entering the clearing ahead of them with an effortless bound. The boy's heart swelled, and the excitement of the hunt made his blood sing. Iron-shod hooves drummed through the swishing grasses. Ahead of them, ghost-white against the wet blackness, the stag cleared fallen tree trunks with graceful leaps and bounded toward the far edge of the glade, with the prince in hot pursuit.

Conn leaned over the pony's neck, one strong brown hand clenching the light javelin. Ahead of him, like a will-o'-the-wisp, the white stag glowed. But a dense wall of trees rose beyond. His heart pounding, Conn knew the

stag must slow its pace or go floundering into that barrier.

The next instant, even as he flung back one arm to hurl the javelin, it happened. The stag dissolved into mist—a mist that reformed into a tall, gaunt, human shape clothed in white robes. It was a woman, from the billowing cloud of iron-grey hair that swirled about the bony, calm, expressionless mask of its face.

Terror smote Conn. The pony reared, eyes rolling, and neighed shrilly, then came down and stood motionless, shuddering. Conn stared into the cold, cat-green eyes of the woman-thing before him.

Silence stretched taut between them. In the stillness, Conn was aware of his trembling hands, his thudding heart, the sour taste in his dry mouth. Was this fear? Who was this ghost-woman, to teach fear to the son of Conan the Conqueror?

With a violent effort of will, the boy clamped his quivering fingers about the shaft of the javelin. Ghost, witch, or werewoman—the son of Conan would show no fear!

Eyes of lambent green flame smiled with cold mockery into the boy's imitation of his sire's glare. With one gaunt hand, the woman gestured slowly. Leaves crackled; twigs snapped.

The boy jerked his head around, and his grim expression faltered to see the weird forms that stepped into the clearing from all sides.

They were lean men, gaunt as mummies and of superhuman stature. Taller even than the mighty Conan, many topped seven feet. From throat to wrist and heel they were clad in black gar-

ments that fitted as tightly as gloves. Even their heads were hooded in tight black cowls. Their hands were bony, thin, and long-fingered, and they bore curious weapons. These were rods or batons, over two feet long, of sleek, gleaming black wood. The ends of each rod were slightly smaller than fowl's eggs.

It was their faces that struck into his heart the thrill of superstitious awe. For they *had* no faces! Beneath the tight-fitting black cowls, their visages were smooth, blank, white ovals.

FEW WOULD HAVE BLAMED the lad if he had fled in fear. But he did not flee. Though only twelve, he was sprung from a savage line of mighty warriors and brave women, and few of his forefathers had faltered in the face of danger or death. His ancestors had faced the terrible giant bear, the dread snow-dragons of the Eiglophian mountains, and rare saber-toothed tiger of the cave country. They had fought these creatures knee-deep in winter snows, while the quivering curtain of the northern lights flickered overhead. In this moment of peril, his barbaric ancestry awoke within the boy.

The woman raised her head and called out a short phrase, in strongly accented Aquilonian:

"Yield, boy!"

"Never!" shouted Conn. Yelling the Cimmerian war cry learned from his mighty sire, he couched his javelin like a lance at the nearest of the black-clad faceless ones and spurred his tired pony once more.

No flicker of emotion disturbed the

calm old face of the white-clad woman. Before the pony could make more than one weary bound, agonizing pain shot up Conn's arm. He gasped, doubling over in the saddle. The javelin flew from his numb fingers, to thud into the wet grass.

One of the black-clad men closing in on him had glided close with magical swiftness. With one bony hand, the man had caught the pony's bridle. With the other, the man had whipped up his slender wooden baton. The ball on one end had stroked the tip of Conn's elbow. The touch of the rod, wielded with exquisite control, had struck the cluster of nerves under the joint. The pain was blinding.

The black-clad man recovered his stance and whipped back the rod for another blow. But the woman cried out in an unfamiliar tongue. She spoke in a deep, harsh, metallic, sexless voice. The faceless man in black withheld his blow.

But Conn did not yield. With an inarticulate cry, he caught with his left hand at the hilt of the falchion that hung at his hip. Clumsily he dragged it forth and reversed his grip upon it. The black-clad men were all around him now, with skinny hands reaching out on long black arms.

Conan swung backhanded at the nearest. The blade struck the man's long neck and laid open his throat. With a gurgling groan, the tall man folded at the knees and fell face-down in the wet grass.

Conn raked his spurs against the pony's ribs, shouting a command to the beast. The pony reared with a shrill whinny as the other faceless men glided

in from all sides. Then it lashed out at them with iron-shod hoofs. Like phantoms, the men evaded the hoofs. One flicked out his rod. The knob struck Conn's wrist with diabolical accuracy, and away went the falchion from his flaccid fingers. Another metal ball on the end of a black rod gently stroked the back of Conn's head. The boy fell from the saddle, a bundle of loose limbs. One man caught him in gaunt, black-clad arms and eased him to the grass, while others brought the pony under control.

The green-eyed woman bent over the unconscious lad.

"Conn, Crown Prince of Aquilonia, heir apparent to the throne of Conan," she said in her harsh voice. She uttered a dry, mirthless laugh. "Thoth-Amon will be pleased."

3. RUNES OF BLOOD

CONAN WAS HUNCHED over in the saddle, hungrily munching a bit of roast boar, when Euric, the chief huntsman, came to him.

The king straightened wearily, spat out a bit of gristle, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Anything?" he grunted. The old huntsman nodded and held out a curious object.

"This," he said.

Conan eyed it warily. It was an ivory mask, delicately carved to fit closely a long-jawed, narrow-chinned, high-cheekboned human face. The queer thing about it was that it was modelled featurelessly, presenting—except for the eye slits—a blank oval of sleek ivory to the eye. Conan did not like the look

of it.

"Hyperborean work," he spat. "Anything else?"

The old huntsman nodded. "Blood on the grass, the grass itself trampled, hoofmarks of a young pony, and—*this*."

The fires in Conan's eyes dulled and his face sagged. It was the falchion he had given as a gift to Conn, celebrating the latter's twelfth birthday. The coronet of an Aquilonian prince was etched in the silver of the guard.

"Nothing else?"

"The dogs are sniffing about for a trail now," said Euric.

Conan nodded heavily. "When they've found the track, sound your horn and gather the men," he growled.

The sun was high; the lank grasses smelled wet; the air was steamy and humid. But again the King of Aquilonia shivered as if an unseen draught of icy air were blowing upon his heart.

THE SUN was an hour older before they found the corpse. It had been carefully buried at the bottom of a gully, beneath a mound of dead leaves and moist earth. But the eager hounds sniffed it out, baying their deep-chested song to call the huntsmen.

Conan rode down to the bed of the gully to examine the corpse. The body had been stripped. The man had been nearly seven feet tall and gaunt. His skin was white as parchment. His hair, too, was a silky white. His throat had been slashed.

Euric crouched over the dirt-stained corpse, sniffing the blood, dipping his fingers in the wound, and thoughtfully rubbing bloody fingertips together. Conan waited in moody silence. At last

the old man rose stiffly, wiping his hands.

"Sometime last night, sire," he said.

Conan looked the corpse over, his gaze lingering on its long-jawed, narrow-chinned, high-cheekboned face. The man was a Hyperborean: his lean height, unnatural pallor, and silky, colorless hair told Conan that. Dead cat-green eyes stared up from among the wet dirt and sodden leaves.

"Loose the hounds again, Euric. Prospero! Bid the men be wary. We are being led," said Conan.

They rode on together. After a time, the Poitanian general cleared his throat. "You think the mask and falchion were left behind for a purpose, sire?"

"I know it," Conan growled. "In my bones; the way an old stiflegged soldier knows when rain is coming. There's a pack of those white devils ahead somewhere. They have my boy. They are herding us, damn their guts!"

"Into an ambush?" asked Prospero. Conan chewed the idea over in silence, then shook his head.

"I doubt it. We've ridden safely through three perfect sites for such a trap in the past hour. No; they have some other purpose in mind. A message, perhaps, waiting for us up the trail."

Prospero considered this. "Mayhap they are holding the Prince for ransom."

"Or for bait," said Conan, his eyes blazing like those of an angry beast. "I was a captive in Hyperborea once. What I suffered at their hands gave me no cause to love those bony devils; and what I did there, ere I took my



leave of their hospitality, gave them little cause to love me!"

"What means the ivory mask?"

Conan spat and took a swig of lukewarm wine. "It's a shadowy land of devils. Dead and barren, cloaked ever in clammy mists, ruled by naked, grinning fear. A weird cult of black-clad wizard-assassins hold power through the terror of their uncanny arts. They kill without a mark and fight only with wooden rods, tipped with balls of a strange rare, gray, heavy metal called platinum, common in their land. An old woman is their priestess-queen; they think her the incarnation of their death goddess. They who serve in her shadowy legions of skulking killers undergo strange mortification of body, mind, and will. The masks are an example of their fanaticism. They are the deadliest fighters in the world; blind faith in their devil-gods makes them immune to fear and pain."

They rode forward without further words. In the minds of both men was a dreadful picture—a helpless boy, captive in a land of fanatical death-worshippers, whose witch-queen had for years nursed a burning hatred of Conan.

Towards early afternoon, the trees thinned out as the forests of eastern Gunderland gave way to chalk moors overgrown with straggling patches of heather and bracken. They were near the limits of Conan's realm. Not far beyond lay the place where the frontiers of Aquilonia, Cimmeria, the Border Kingdom, and Nemedia met.

The sky was overcast, and there was a bite to the air. Wind ruffled the purple heather in chill, sudden gusts.

The sun was a gray disk, weak and ineffectual. Birds cawed hoarsely, far on the dim moors. It was a grim, bleak land of desolation.

Conan rode in front. Suddenly he drew up his weary roan, flinging up one arm to halt his company. Then he sat slumped in the saddle, staring grimly at the thing that blocked their path. In ones and twos the men behind dismounted and came forward to stand about him, staring.

It was a light willow-wood javelin, such as a young boy might select for hunting a stag. The point was buried deep in the bracken. The haft of the spear thrust straight up into the air. Wrapped about it was a bit of white parchment.

Euric unfastened it with deft fingers and handed it up to the King where he sat his roan, eyes heavy. The parchment crackled loudly as Conan unrolled it.

The message was crudely scrawled in Aquilonian. Conan scanned it silently, his dark face sullen, then handed it down to Prospero, who spelled it out slowly for the men to hear.

THE KING SHALL GO FORWARD
ALONE TO POHIOLA. IF HE DOES
THIS, THE SON OF HIS LOINS WILL
NOT BE HARMED. IF HE DOES
OTHER THAN THIS, THE CHILD
WILL DIE IN WAYS IT IS NOT
WHOLESOME TO DESCRIBE. THE
KING SHALL FOLLOW THE PATH
MARKED WITH THE WHITE HAND.

Prospero examined the rusty-brown scrawl of runes, then gave a little exclamation of disgust. The message was written in blood.

SO CONAN WENT FORWARD alone into the moorland beyond the borders of Aquilonia. The conventional course would have been to return to Tanasul, muster the civil guard, and ride against misty Hyperborea in force. But, had Conan followed that course, the assassins would murder the boy. All that Conan could do was to follow the commands in the parchment scroll.

Conan had given Prospero the great seal-ring of massive gold he wore on his right thumb. Possession of that ring made the Poitanian regent of the kingdom until Conan returned. If he did not return, his infant second son would become rightful king of the Aquilonians, under the dual regency of Queen Zenobia and Prospero.

As he voiced these instructions, staring into Prospero's eyes, he knew the gallant soldier would follow them to the letter. And there was one instruction more. Prospero should raise the levy of Tanasul and ride after him, to invade Hyperborea on his heels and make for the citadel of Pohiola.

This gave Prospero a sense of purpose. But Conan knew that one man, well-mounted, could ride farther and faster than a full troop of horses. He would be within the glowering walls of Pohiola long before Prospero's force could possibly arrive to be of any help.

THIS LAND was called the Border Kingdom. It was a dreary waste of desolate, empty moors, which swept off to the dim horizon. Here and there, gnarled and stunted trees grew sparsely. Waterbirds rose flapping from

misty bogs. A cold, uneasy wind whined through rattling reeds with a lonely song.

Conan went forward, careful of his footing but with all possible haste. His red roan, Ymir, was winded from the nightlong ride through the forest, so Conan had taken the big grey from Baron Guilaime of Imirus. The fat peer was the heaviest man in the party other than Conan himself, and his burly-chested gray was the only steed that might bear up under the weight of the giant Cimmerian. Conan had thrown off his hunting gear, donning a plain leather jerkin and a well-oiled shirt of close-linked mail. His broadsword was slung between his shoulders to leave his hands free. He had hung a powerful Hyrkanian bow, a length of supple silk cord, and a quiver of black-feathered cloth-yard shafts on his saddle-bow. Then he had ridden off across the moors without a backwards glance.

At first he followed a clearly-marked trail, for the steeds of the Hyperboreans had left a track in the muddy soil. He pushed the grey stallion hard, for he wanted to make the best possible time. There was the slimmest of chances that, with luck and the favor of Crom, his savage god, he could catch up with the white-skinned kidnappers before they reached their keep of Pohiola.

Soon the trail of the Hyperborean horses faded out on stony soil. But there was little chance to lose the trail, for now and again he passed a sign that his son's abductors had left to guide him: the imprint of a hand, white against rock or soil. Betimes it was seared into the dry, scrubby grass of a hummock like a pattern of frost left

by a blast of preternatural cold.

Witchcraft! He growled, deep in his throat, and his nape-hairs prickled. His own homeland, Cimmeria, lay to the northwest. His primitive folk knew of the White Hand, dread symbol of the Witchmen of Hyperborea. He shivered at the thought that his son was their captive.

But he rode on, over the dreary plains past pools of cold black water and scrubby patches of bracken cut by meandering streamlets and dotted by hummocks of dry grass. Hour after hour he rode steadily, as the world darkened around him towards night. One by one the stars came out, though they were faint and few, for a haze overhung the sky. When at length the moon emerged, its cold face lay masked behind a lacy veil of vapor.

Toward dawn he could ride no more. Stiff and aching, he climbed down and tied a bag of grain to the muzzle of his gray. He built a small fire with dry bracken, stretched out with his head pillowed on his saddle, and fell into a heavy sleep.

FOR THREE DAYS, he rode ever deeper into this dreary wasteland, skirting the swampy borders of the Great Salt Marsh. This sprawling bog may have been the remnant of a vast inland sea that had rolled over all this land ages ago, perhaps before the dawn of civilization. The ground was becoming treacherous, and the deeper he rode into the Border Kingdom, the worse the footing became. The big grey stallion wound through the bogs, head down, testing each hummock for soundness. The pools of cold, muddy

water became more numerous. Soon Conan was riding through a treeless swamp.

Twilight came, plunging the bogland in gloom. The gray shied nervously, as his hooves came out of the sucking mud with a smacking sound. Bats swooped and chittered in the dusk. A mottled, clay-colored viper, thick as a man's arm, slithered noiselessly over a mold-covered log.

As the darkness thickened, Conan set his jaw and drove the gray forward. He meant to keep going all night again and to rest toward midday if he must.

Ahead, the path branched. Conan leaned from the saddle to study the bracken. A smooth stone lay exposed by the incessant rains. Upon that stone he glimpsed again a weird white blazon in the shape of an open hand. He tugged the stallion's head around and drove it into the pathway marked by the White Hand.

Suddenly, the muddy heather was alive with men. They were filthy, gaunt, and naked, save for twists of greasy rag about their loins. Long matted hair lay in a tangle about snarling faces.

Conan roared a deep-chested challenge and pulled the stallion up. He ripped the broadsword clear of its scabbard.

The beast-men were all about him now, grabbing at boots and stirrups, pulling at the skirt of his mail, seizing handfuls of mane to drag the horse down. But the gray's hoofs slashed out. One caught the foremost man in the face and cracked his skull. Pulped brains splattered amidst flying blood. Another caught a big-chested man on

the shoulder, shattering his arm.

Conan's blade whistled, making heads jump from spurting necks, knocking brutish figures flying. Five he slew; a sixth he clove from pate to jaw. But the steel bit deep in tough bone. As the corpse fell back, the sword was wrenched out of Conan's grip. He sprang after it, splashing, and the yelping herd of beast-like men were all over him. Feral eyes gleamed; talon-like fingers raked his arms. They dragged him down, muffling him beneath the weight of sheer numbers. One brought a club of knotted wood down on Conan's temple. The world exploded, and Conan forgot about fighting.

5. A PHANTOM FROM THE PAST

OUT OF THE DIM and swirling mists, the rounded knoll of a hill loomed up before them on the stone-paved way. Worn and weary from days and nights of travel, Conn blinked bleary eyes and regarded it.

The crest of the knoll was crowned with a mighty keep, a rude castle built of huge, cyclopean blocks of unmortared stone. Ghostly in the dim starlight, indistinctly seen through the crawling film of mist, it looked like an apparition. Squat towers rose at either end of the massive edifice, wreathed in coiling fog. Toward the frowning portal of the looming keep they rode. As it grew nearer, Conn saw the great portcullis slowly lifting. The half-starved boy repressed a shudder. The rise of the spiked grill of rusty iron was like the slow yawn of a gigantic monster.

Through the vast portal they rode,

into an enormous hall, weirdly lit with the flickering light of torches. The portcullis came down behind them, to ring against the stone pave like the knell of doom.

Cold white hands plucked the boy from the saddle and tossed him into a corner. He crouched against the dank wall of stone, staring around him. Bit by bit, the features of the vast echoing hall began to emerge from the gloom. The keep was one tremendous hall. The roof, whose rafters were lost in the darkness, loomed far above his head. The only visible furniture was a rude wooden bench or two, a couple of stools, and a long trestle table. On the table lay a wooden platter laden with cold scraps of greasy meat and a sodden lump of coarse black bread. The boy eyed this garbage hungrily. As if sensing his thoughts, the old woman muttered a command. One of the men took the platter from the table and set it down beside Conn.

His hands were numb, for they had bound his wrists to the saddle horn during the days and nights of riding. The man cut the thong that bound his wrists and slipped a length of chain about his neck, padlocking the other end to a rusty iron ring in the wall above his head. Conn fell on the remnants of the meal as the man watched silently.

The Witchman had removed his ivory mask, so that Conn could see his face. It was pale and bony and bore an expression of inhuman serenity. Conn did not like the thin, colorless lips or the cold glitter of the green eyes but was too hungry, cold, and miserable to care what his captors looked like.

Another man approached with a few pieces of dirty sackcloth draped over his arm. He tossed these down beside the chained lad; then both men left him alone. After he had eaten all there was, Conn scraped together some of the filthy straw wherewith the floor of the immense, echoing hall was strewn. He piled the sacking upon this, curled up, and fell asleep at once.

THE DULL SOUND of a stricken gong awoke him. In this gloomy pile of stone, the light of day never pierced, so Conn had lost all sense of time.

He looked up, rubbing his eyes. A low, circular stone dais rose in the center of the hall; upon this the witch was seated, tailor-fashion. A great copper bowl of glowing coals had been set before her, shedding a wavering light the color of blood upon her face.

Conn studied her narrowly. She was old. Her face was worn with a thousand furrows, and her gray hair dangling loosely about the expressionless mask of her features. But life burned strongly within those eyes of emerald flame and their uncanny gaze was fixed upon nothingness.

At the foot of the dais, one of the black-clad men crouched, striking a padded mallet against a small gong in the shape of a human skull. The dull ringing of the gong echoed eerily.

The Witchmen entered the room in single file. They had donned their ivory masks and pulled the tight black cowls up to cover their silky hair. One led a naked, shaggy-headed man. Conn remembered that while crossing the endless swamps days before, the death-worshippers had taken this man

captive. They had tied a noose about his neck and forced him to trot along behind their horses or fall and be dragged. The man was deformed, witless, and filthy. His mouth hung open and his eyes gleamed with fear.

An uncanny ritual now took place. Two Witchmen knelt and secured the captive's feet with a thong suspended from a rafter. Then they slowly drew the naked man up until he hung head-downward above the copper bowl of simmering coals. The man writhed and screamed to no avail.

Then they cut his throat from ear to ear.

The victim wriggled and flopped, then slowly went limp. Conn watched, eyes wide with horror. Blood gushed down upon the coals and exploded in a cloud of smoke. A nauseous stench arose.

All this time, the witch stared sightlessly ahead. Conn observed that she was swaying from side to side, humming a tuneless air. The black-clad men stood motionless about the dais. The coals crackled and snapped. The corpse hung dripping. The thin, eerie moan of the witch's song droned on, punctuated by the monotonous rhythm of the gong. Conn stared with helpless fascination.

The stinking smoke hung in a greasy pall above the dais, eddying to and fro as if to the touch of invisible hands. Then the white-faced boy repressed a start.

"Crom!" he gasped.

The roiling cloud of smoke was taking on the shape of a man: a large, broad-shouldered, powerful man, draped in some Eastern robe whose

cowl was thrust back to reveal a shaven pate and a grim, hawklike face.

The illusion was uncanny. The witch droned on. Her rasping song rose and fell like a cold wind moaning through the timbers of a gibbet.

Now color flushed through the man-shaped phantom: the folds of the robe darkened to a shade of green and the stolid visage became a swarthy, ruddy brown, like the face of a Shemite or a Stygian. Frozen with fear, the boy searched the translucent phantom with wide eyes. The illusion had a face he dimly remembered seeing or hearing described—those aloof, aquiline features, that grim, lipless mouth. Where the eyes should have been were two sparks of emerald fire.

The lips moved, and the distant echo of a voice resounded through the shadowy hall.

"Hail, O Louhi!" said the phantom. And the witch answered:

"Greetings, *Thoth-Amon*."

Then, in truth, did the chilly claws of fear close around Conn's heart, for he knew he was in the grip of no casual kidnapper. He was in the clutches of the most deadly and tenacious foe of his race, the earth's mightiest black magician, the Stygian sorcerer who had long ago sworn by his evil gods to bring Conan the Cimmerian down to a terrible death and to crush Aquilonia into the mire.

6. BEYOND SKULL GATE

TOWARD SUNRISE, Conan groggily struggled to consciousness. His head ached abominably, and blood from a torn scalp had dried down his face. But he still lived.

As for the shaggy beast-men of the swamp country, there was no sign of them. They had fled into the night, bearing off their dead and their loot. Groaning, he sat up, nursing his throbbing head in his hands. He was naked save for boots and a ragged clout. Horse, mail, provisions, and weapons had been stripped from him. Had the beast-men left him for dead? Perhaps; only the thickness of his skull had kept the Cimmerian from that grim end.

Legend whispered that the beast-men were the degenerate spawn of generations of escaped criminals and runaway slaves, who had fled hither for sanctuary. Centuries of inbreeding had debased them to little above the level of animals. Odd, then, that they had left his body untouched; for men reduced to their primitive level often developed a lust for human flesh. Not until Conan had staggered to his feet did he discover what had driven the beast-men away.

Seared into muddy grasses, near where he had been struck down, was the imprint of the White Hand.

There was naught else to do but go on afoot. Fashioning a rude cudgel from the branch of a twisted tree, the burly Cimmerian struck out for the northeast, following the trail blazoned for him by the White Hand.

As a savage boy in his wintry homeland, he had learned how to live off the land. As king of proud Aquilonia, it had been many years since last he had been forced to hunt and kill to live. Now he was glad old skills die hard. With stones, hurled from a rude sling improvised from a strip of cloth ripped from his clout, he brought down

marsh birds. Lacking the means to make fire in these sodden bogs, he plucked the fowl and devoured them raw. With the cudgel, swung with all the iron strength of massive thews, he beat off wild dogs that attacked him. With sharp broken sticks he probed for frogs and crayfish in muddy pools. Ever he kept moving north and east.

After an endless time, he came to the edge of the Border Kingdom. The entrance to Hyperborea was marked by a curious monument, calculated to strike fear into the hearts of men.

Under a lowering sky, hills rose in a grim rampart. The trail he followed wound through a narrow pass between two rounded knolls. Imbedded in the nearer flank of one hill was a weird marker. It shone grey-white through the gloom and damp of Hyperborea. As he came near enough to make it out, he stopped short and stood, massive arms folded.

It was a skull, manlike in shape but many times larger than that of a man. The sight raised Conan's nape-hairs with primal awe and stirred to life shadowy myths of ogres and giants. But as he studied the vast shield of naked bone with narrowed eyes, a grim smile tugged at his lips. He had travelled far in his years of adventuring, and he recognized the grisly relic for the skull of a mammoth. The skulls of beasts of the elephant tribe bear a superficial resemblance to those of men, save, of course, for the curving tusks. In this case, the telltale tusks had been sawn away. Conan grinned and spat. He felt heartened; those who use trickery to inspire superstitious fear are not invulnerable.

Across the brow of the mammoth skull, enormous Hyperborean runes were painted.

In his travels Conan had picked up a smattering of many tongues. With some difficulty he could read the warning written in those uncouth characters.

The Gate of Hyperborea is the Gate of Death to those who come hither without leave, ran the warning.

Conan grunted contemptuously, strode on through the pass, and found himself in a haunted land.

BEYOND SKULL GATE, the land fell away in a bleak plain broken by naked hills. Crumbling stones lay bare under a brooding sky. Conan went forward through clammy mists, every sense alert. But for all that he could tell, naught lived or moved in all this shadowy land of unseen peril.

Few dwelt in this cold realm of fear, where the wintry sun shone but briefly. They who ruled here reigned from high-towered keeps of cyclopean stone. As for the common folk, a few miserable, terror-haunted serfs, in clusters of dilapidated hovels, eked out a drab life from the barren soil.

The gaunt gray wolves of the north roamed these desolate prairies in savage hunting bands, he knew; and the ferocious cave bear made its home in stony caves under the dripping skies. But little else could dwell in this inhospitable waste, save a rare band of reindeer, muskox, or mammoth.

Conan came at length to the first of the stone-built keeps; this he knew for Sigtona. In Asgard they whispered grim tales of its sadistic queen, rumored to

live on human blood. He skirted it widely, searching for the next mountainous citadel.

After an interminable time, he espied the grim pile of Pohiola, lifting its crest of squat turrets against the stars. Naked, famished, filthy, and unarmed, the indomitable Cimmerian gazed upon the stronghold of the Witchmen with burning eyes. Somewhere within that lightless and labyrinthine edifice, perhaps, his doom where within that lightless and labyrinthine edifice, perhaps, his doom awaited him. Well, he had crossed swords with Death ere this, and from that desperate contest emerged the victor.

Head high, he went through the darkness to the portals of Pohiola.

7. THE WITCH-WOMAN

THE IRON FANGS of the portcullis hung above the stone-paved way that led to the great gate. The gate itself was a mighty door of black wood, studded with the heads of iron nails. These nails spelt out some protective rune in a tongue even the burly Cimmerian did not know. The door was open.

Conan strode within. The stone walls, he grimly noted, were twenty paces thick. He passed into the central hall of the great keep. It was deserted, save for an old woman with lank gray hair. She squatted atop a circular stone dais, staring into the flickering flames of a dish of red coals. This he knew for Louhi, priestess-queen of the Witchmen, who regarded her as the living avatar of their death-goddess. Boot heels ringing on the stone pave,

the half-naked giant strode the breadth of the mighty hall and took a bold stance before the dais, arms folded upon his breast.

After a while, she shifted her cat-green glare from the simmering coals to his face, and Conan felt the impact of her gaze. She was old, lean, and withered, but he sensed an extraordinary personality behind that wrinkled mask.

"Thoth-Amon says I should slay you on the spot, or at very least load you with chains heavy enough to bind ten men," she began. Her voice was throaty and metallic.

No flicker of emotion touched Conan's stern visage. "Let me see my son," he growled.

"Thoth-Amon says you are the most dangerous man in the world," she continued calmly, as if he had not spoken. "But I have always thought that Thoth-Amon was himself more dangerous than any other man living. It is odd. Are you really so dangerous?"

"I want to see my son," he repeated.

"You do not look so very dangerous to me," she went on serenely. "You are strong, yes, and you have great powers of endurance. I doubt not that you are brave enough, as mortal men count bravery. But you are only a man. I cannot understand what there could be about you that moves Thoth-Amon to fear," she mused.

"He fears me because he knows that I am his doom," said Conan. "As I shall be yours, unless you take me to my son."

Her wrinkled face froze, and eyes of lambent green glared coldly into Conan's. He glowered at her, his gaze

of smouldering volcanic blue blazing under black, scowling brows. Her gaze intensified, cold and piercing. His gaze did not falter, and it was the green eyes that fell at last and looked away.

Inhumanly tall, impossibly slim, a lantern-jawed, milk-faced man with flaxen hair, clothed in glove-tight black, appeared at Conan's side, as if in response to an unspoken call. The witch-woman did not look up, and some of the calm strength had left her rasping voice when she spoke.

"Take him to his son," she said.

THEY HAD IMMURED Prince Conn at the bottom of a stone-lined pit sunk deep in the floor of the vast, echoing hall. It was like a dry well, built of the same unmortared stone as the rest of the keep, and it was an effective cell for a prisoner. They lowered Conan into the depths of the hole by a rope, which was drawn up after he reached the bottom.

The boy was huddled at one side, against the wall of the shaft, on a pile of damp sacking. He sprang to his feet and flung himself into his father's arms as soon as he recognized the half-naked giant. Conan crushed the boy to him in a fierce hug, growling sulphurous curses to disguise the unmanly tenderness he felt. Ending the embrace, he seized the boy by the shoulders and shook him, promising him a caning he would never forget if ever again he acted so stupidly. The words were threatening and their tone was gruff, but tears were running down his scarred face.

Then he held the boy at arms-length, looking him over carefully. The boy's

raiment was torn and dirtied, his face pale and hollow-cheeked, but the king could see that his son was unharmed. He had come through an experience that would have left most other children of his years hysterical. Conan grinned and gave him an affectionate hug.

"Father, Thoth-Amon is in this," Conn whispered excitedly.

"I know," grunted Conan.

"Last night the old witch conjured him up," Conn went on eagerly. "They hung a savage by his heels over the fire and cut his throat and let the blood run down on the coals! Then she conjured Thoth-Amon's spirit out of the smoke!"

"What did they talk about?"

"When Thoth-Amon heard that you were crossing the Border Kingdom alone, he wanted her to kill you with her magic! She said, why do that? And he said, you were too dangerous to live. They argued for a long time about that."

Conan rubbed a big hand over his stubbled jaw. "Any idea why the witch refused to kill me?"

"I think she wants to keep you and me alive as a sort of way of keeping Thoth-Amon under her control," the boy confided. "They are in some sort of plot together, with a lot of other magicians all over the world. Thoth-Amon is a lot stronger and more important than the old witch, but so long as she has you he doesn't dare try to boss her too much."

"You may well be right, son," Conan mused. "Did you overhear anything more about this plot? Plot against what?"



"Against the kingdoms of the West," Conn said. "Thoth-Amon is the chief of all the wicked magicians in the South, Khem and Stygia and Kush and Zembabwei, and the jungle countries. There's a sort of wizard's guild or something down there called the Black Ring—"

Conan started, voicing an involuntary grunt.

"What about the Black Ring?" he demanded.

The boy's voice rose with excitement. "Thoth-Amon is the high chief of the Black Ring, and he's trying to league with the White Hand here in the north, and with something way out in the Far East called the Scarlet Circle!"

Conan groaned. He knew of the Black Ring, that ancient brotherhood of evil. He knew of the abominable sorceries practiced by the votaries of the Ring in the shadow-haunted crypts of accursed Stygia. Years ago, Thoth-Amon had been a powerful prince of that order, but he had fallen from power and his place had been taken by another, one Thutothmes. Thutothmes was dead, and now it seemed that Thoth-Amon had arisen to supremacy at last, at the head of the age-old fraternity of black magicians. That boded ill for the bright young kingdoms of the West.

THEY TALKED UNTIL Conn had told his father all he knew. Then, worn out by his adventures, the boy fell asleep, pillowed against Conan's brawny torso. His arm about the shoulders of his son in a gently protective embrace, Conan did not sleep. He stared grimly into the darkness, wondering what the future would bring.

THREE MEN and a woman sat in thronelike chairs of black wood atop the huge stone dais, which rose amidst the great hall of Pohiola. The chairs were ranged in a half-circle about a vast copper bowl filled with glowing coals.

Beyond the walls of the cavernous keep, a thunderous storm raged wildly. Lightning slashed through boiling black clouds like knives of flame. Sleety rain whipped against the looming stone pile. The earth shuddered to the peals of thunder, which exploded amidst the storm clouds.

Within the hall, however, the din of the storm was stilled to a murmur. Gloom shrouded the vastness of the mighty keep. The air was dank and cold. The four sat silently, and between them was stretched an ominous tension. They watched one another out of the corners of their eyes.

From far off in the echoing darkness, a double file of the black-clad servants of the White Hand approached. Among them, the majestic figure of Conan towered. His dark face was impassive, and firelight gleamed on his naked chest. At his side strode his son, head high. The Witchmen brought them to the foot of the dais.

Conan lifted his glowering gaze to stare directly into the cold black eyes of a powerfully-built man in a dark-green robe, with a shaven pate and flesh of dark copper.

"We meet again, dog of a Cimmerian," said Thoth-Amon in gutturally accented Aquilonian.

Conan grunted and spat. Father and son had slept, and waked, been fed,

and slept again. Disdaining to reply, Conan turned his gaze on the others who sat enthroned. The Hyperborean witch-woman he knew, but the other two were strangers to him. The first was a diminutive, effeminate little man in fantastic jewelled robes, with amber skin, fleshy arms covered with glittering rings, and the cold, bright, soulless eyes of a snake.

"This is the divine Pra-Eun, the Lord of the Scarlet Circle, the sacred god-king of jungle-girdled Angkhor in the remote east of the world," said Thoth-Amon. Conan made no response, but the plump little Kambujan smiled suavely.

"The so-great king of Aquilonia and I are old friends—although he knows me not. He once did me the kindest of favors," he said in a high-pitched, lisping voice.

"I fear I know not this tale," Thoth-Amon confessed. Pra-Eun smiled brilliantly.

"But yes! Some years ago he did to death the formidable Yah Chieng—perhaps he recalls the occasion? That person was a most powerful sorcerer of Khitai. He was my rival and my superior, as head of the Scarlet Circle. I am beholden to the brave monarch of Aquilonia, for had he not slain the miserable Yah Chieng, I should not today be the supreme master of my order!"

Again, Pra-Eun smiled brilliantly, but Conan noticed that his smile did not reach as far as his eyes. They remained as hard and cold as the eyes of a viper.

Beyond the little god-king sat Louhi in her robes of white; and beyond her a savage black towered. He was a mag-

nificent specimen of manhood, his oiled arms sleek with gliding thews, his woolly head crowned with nodding plumes. About his muscular torso was flung a cloak of leopard skins. Rings of raw gold clasped his wrists and upper arms. His stolid features were immobile. Only the eyes moved and lived, and they burned with feral red flames.

"And this is the great *boccor* or shaman, Nenaunir, prophet and high priest of Damballah—as they call Father Set—in far Zembabwei," continued Thoth-Amon. "Three million naked blacks will arise to sweep all the world below Kush with flame and blood at one word from Nenaunir."

Conan said nothing. The magnificent black grunted.

"He does not look so dangerous to me, Stygian," he said in a cold, deep, heavy voice. "Why do you fear him so?"

A darker hue stained the features of Thoth-Amon. His lips parted but, before he could speak, the old woman uttered a harsh laugh.

"I agree with the Lord of Zembabwei!" Louhi rasped. "And I have planned a small entertainment for the pleasure of my guests. *Kamoinen!*" She clapped her hands.

The circle of Witchmen parted, permitting one of their number to step forth. He had a long, whey-colored face and pale blue eyes. In the thin fingers of one white, bony hand he held a slim black rod less than one pace in length. It was tipped at each end with a ball of dully-gleaming metal, slightly smaller than a fowl's egg.

He saluted his queen. "Command me, Avatar," he said in a toneless voice.

The cat-green eyes flashed in the stern, wrinkled mask. They burned upon Conan with malignant fires.

"Beat the Cimmerian to his knees before us," she rasped, "so that my colleagues can see they have little to fear from this man Conan!"

THE SLIM, black-clad man bowed low. Then he swung upon Conan, ball-tipped rod blurring through the air. But the wary Cimmerian took a great leap backwards to avoid the strange wooden rod, whose purpose he did not understand. It hissed past his face, ruffling his grey-shot mane as it flew.

The two circled in a half-crouch. Conan clenched and unclenched his heavy hands. His savage instinct was to spring upon the gaunt Hyperborean and crush him to earth with one sledgehammer blow. But something warned him to be wary of that slender, harmless-looking baton that swung so agilely from the long white fingers.

Standing back among the Witchmen, young Conn chewed his knuckles. Suddenly he took his hand away and shrilled out a rapid sentence in Cimmerian. It was a harsh, uncouth tongue, full of singsong vowels and crashing, guttural consonants. None in the room, save his sire, knew it.

Conan's eyes narrowed. The boy had warned him that the Witchmen plied their rods against sensitive nerve clusters. Suddenly, Conan lunged like a striking tiger at his opponent, clumsily lifting a balled fist as if to sweep him off his feet with a wide blow. The weighted rod flicked out at his elbow.

As the rod flashed for the joint of Conan's right arm, whose fist was lifted

above his head, the Cimmerian swivelled suddenly and smashed the rod aside with his left.

The blow only grazed Conan's left forearm, but it sent a bolt of pain lancing from wrist to shoulder. This, however, did not really matter. Conan gritted his teeth against the pain and smashed the man flat with a crushing blow of his balled right fist.

In the same blur of furious action, Conan bent, snatched the Witchman up before he hit the floor, whirled on the balls of his feet, and sent his antagonist flying through the air.

The flailing, black-clad figure flew and hit the huge copper bowl atop the dais. The bowl was filled to the brim with blazing, red-hot coals. It went over with a noisy clang, bathing the four astounded adepts in a fiery shower.

Louhi screamed as her white robes burst aflame. Thoth-Amon roared, shielding his face with his arms as blazing, blistering coals spewed over them. In his clumsy haste to avoid the flying shower of flame, the little Kam-bujan knocked over his throne. He tripped across its legs and fell into the puddle of flame.

The hall exploded in chaos. The circle of black-clad guards had broken their immobility, but they were too late. For Conan was among them in an instant, knocking them about like ten-pins. His big scarred fists smashed left and right, and with every blow he dealt a cracked skull, a broken jaw, or a mouthful of shattered teeth.

Young Conn, too, burst into action. Not for nothing had Conan tutored the boy in the art of rough-and-tumble. The instant his father closed with his

first opponent, Conn whirled and kicked the nearest Witchman on the kneecap. The man staggered and fell. Conn kicked him in the head, snatched up a wooden stool, and swung it with both hands at the nearest Witchmen. In the first ten seconds, he felled four men with it.

On the dais, the god-king of Angkor flopped and squealed, his face a seared and blackened mask of pain. Booming his war cry, the gigantic black snatched up a wooden throne-chair and hurled it at Conan.

Conan fell prone, and the heavy chair smashed into the circle of his foes, knocking them sprawling. In a flash, the giant Cimmerian sprang over the tangle of men and leaped upon the dais. His hands lunged at the throat of Thoth-Amon.

But the old witch blundered into his path. Her white robes were a mass of flames, and her screeching rose above the clamor. Conan stumbled aside as she hurtled down the steps of the dais, wrapped in fire. In that instant, Thoth-Amon made his move.

A sudden flash of green flame brightened the hall in a soundless puff of emerald brilliance. The uncanny radiance swirled about the Stygian as Conan stooped to snatch up Louhi's throne as a weapon.

But even Conan's blurring speed was too late. As he hurled the chair, Thoth-Amon, wrapped in green luminescence, faded from sight.

Conan turned. The room was chaos. Scattered coals had set the straw on the floor aflame; maimed and broken men were strewn about the cavernous hall. Afar he spied his son valiantly

swinging the stool. The boy had already injured half a dozen Witchmen, but the others closed about him, swinging their deadly rods. A score of the Witchmen were leaping up the steps of the dais for Conan, with faces grim and cold, deadly black rods flicking.

9. NIGHT OF BLOOD AND FIRE

CONAN SNATCHED UP the copper bowl. The heat remaining in it seared his fingers, but he flung the huge vessel into the first rank of the charging Witchmen. They went down in a tangle of arms and legs. Conan whirled in time to see the mighty black fade from view in a second flare of soundless green fire. That magic, it seemed, could bridge the vast distances of space between frigid Hyperborea and far, jungled Zembabwei. It was obvious that the adepts had used much the same method to travel here in the first place.

"Cimmerian!"

Something in the tone of that lisping voice froze Conan. He turned his head.

The Kambujan was a sorry sight. His fantastic, jewel-covered robes were black with soot, ripped and torn. His gem-crusted crown had fallen away, revealing his shaven skull. His face was hideously blackened and blistered. But through the seared mask his eyes blazed with deadly power into Conan's.

One hand, covered with burns, blisters, and glittering rings, was extended. But a weird force flashed from the tense, quivering fingers to bathe the mighty Cimmerian.

Conan gasped. His flesh numbed as if he had been suddenly plunged into

the depths of an icy river. Paralysis seized his limbs.

Setting his teeth, he struggled against the spell with all his might. His face blackened with effort; his eyes bulged in their sockets. Then the tension drained from him. He was frozen into immobility, and all his giant strength could not break the spell.

Crouched amidst the coals, the little Kambujan smiled, although his burned face winced at the movement of seared lips. Unholy glee blazed in his cold, ophidian eyes.

Slowly he extended his arm to its full length, mumbling strange words of power.

Pain ripped through Conan's mighty heart. Darkness swept about him, sucking him down.

And then, with a sharp thud, the vaned butt of a crossbow bolt appeared, protruding from the side of Pra-Eun's shaven skull. The rest of the missile was buried in the Kambujan's brain. The cold black eyes glazed and went dull.

A shudder swept through the crouched figure. Then the dead thing wobbled and fell forward. The spell snapped, and Conan was free.

He staggered, caught himself, and stood gasping, as strength and vitality flooded back into his benumbed flesh.

He raised his eyes and looked over the corpse of Pra-Eun. At the far extremity of the hall, Euric the huntsman lowered his massive crossbow. It had been the riskiest shot of his career, to hit the crouching sorcerer across the length of the gloom-drenched hall.

Behind him, crowding into the hall, came a dozen mail-clad knights and

a hundred stout guardsmen in the liv-
ery of Tanasul. Prospero had come at last.

AS DAWN LIT the East with pink flame, Conan wrapped a warm wool cloak about the shoulders of his son. Although his hands were bandaged over the burns inflicted by the copper cauldron, he lifted the weary boy astride one of the guardsmen's horses. The long, terrible night of blood and fire was over, and the ending was a happy one. Prospero's knights had swept the keep from end to end, slaughtering every last member of the witch-woman's following. A good night's work, the crushing of the cult of death-worshippers which had ruled the North with the cold hand of terror.

Conan looked back. Flames shot through the arrow-slits of the fortress of Pohiola. Already the roof of the keep had fallen in. Buried in the rubble, under tons of crushed stone, lay the corpses of Pra-Eun and Louhi. Had he not warned Louhi that he would be her doom?

Prospero had ridden like the wind back to Tanasul, had pulled together a fighting force in hours, and had plunged back on the long trail across Gunderland and the Border Kingdom as if a thousand devils were at his back.

Day and by night, he and his grim-faced levy had flogged their horses on, haunted by the fear that they might arrive too late. But they had come, as it chanced, at the most propitious moment. For even as they rode within bowshot of the great keep, no eye had been at battlement or loophole to observe their approach. And the reason

was that Conan was holding at bay half a hundred Witchmen and the four most deadly magicians on earth.

The portcullis had been up and the great iron-studded door swung open at a touch. The servants of the White Hand were too contemptuous of lesser men and too confident in the powers of their cat-eyed queen to bother with bolts for the door.

Now thunder shook the earth. Flames shot up to the heavens. Behind them the great keep came crashing down in ruins. Pohiola was no more, but its evil would linger in myth and fable for thousands of years.

Weary and travel-stained, but with heart-deep content shining in his eyes, Prospero strode up to where Conan stood, leaning upon the horse that bore the sleepy boy. Conan's eyes flashed.

"You even remembered to bring my

Black Wodan!" he grinned, slapping the great stallion on the flanks. It nosed him affectionately.

"Shall we go home now, sire?" Prospero asked.

"Aye—home to Tarantia!" Conan growled. "I've had a bellyfull of hunting. And of being hunted! Devil take these Hyperborean fogs! I've the sour taste of them in my throat." Conan growled. He thoughtfully gazed about.

"What is it, sire?"

"I was just wondering—would you have any more of that good red wine of the Poitanian vineyards? As I recall, after the hunt, there was a little left..."

Conan broke off, flushing. For Prospero had begun to laugh until the tears were pouring down his cheeks, cutting runnels through the caked dust.

—L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP &

LIN CARTER

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JAMES TIPTREE, JR.

FOREVER TO A HUDSON BAY BLANKET

James Tiptree's recent stories for us ("The Peacefulness of Vivyan," "The Man Who Walked Home") have appeared in our companion magazine, AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION—and the story which follows could also as easily be published there, but in this fresh and human treatment of the tragedy of time-travel the element of myth-in-the-making is also present, qualifying it for these pages...

Illustrated by JOE STATON

DOV RAPELLE WAS a nice person, personally. He was so nice you didn't notice that he wasn't overpoweringly bright in a survival sense. He also owned a long skier's body and a lonesome dreamy Canuck face that he got from his fifth grandfather who came out to Calgary, Alberta as a dowser. By the time the face got down to Dov a solid chunk of Alberta Hydroelectric came with it. But the Rapelles lived plain; Calgary, Alberta was one of the few places in the twentyfirst century where a young man could be like Dov and not be spoiled silly.

Calgary has the tallest water-tower on the continent, you know, and all that tetra-wheat and snow sports money. And it's a long way from the Boswash and San Frangeles style of life. People from Calgary still do things like going home to see their folks over winter vacation. And in Calgary you aren't used to being phoned up by

strange girls in Callao, Peru at 0200 Christmas morning.

The girl was quite emotional. Dov kept asking her name and she kept crying and sobbing, "Say something, Dovy, Dovy, *please!*" She had a breathy squeak that sounded young and expensive.

"What should I say?" asked Dov reasonably.

"Your voice, Oh, *Dovy!*" she wept, "I'm so far *away!* Please, please talk to me, Dovy!"

"Well, look," Dov began, and the phone went dead.

When his folks asked him what that was he shrugged and grinned his nice grin. He didn't get it.

Christmas was on Monday. Wednesday night the phone rang again. This time the operator was French, but it was clearly the same girl.

"Dovy? Dovy Rapelle?" She was breathing hard.

"Yeah, speaking. Who's this?"

"Oh, Dovy. *Dovy!* Is that really you?"

"Yeah, it's me. Look, did you call me before?"

"Did I?" she said vaguely. And then she started crying "Oh Dovy, Oh Dovy," and it was the same dialog all over again until the line quit.

He did not get it.

By Friday Dov was beginning to feel hemmed in, so he decided to go check on their cabin on Split Mountain. The Rapelles were not jetbuggy types; they liked peace and quiet. Dov took his plain old four-wheeler out behind Bragg Creek into the pass as far as the plows had been and then he put on his pack and skis and started breaking trail. The snow was perfect, dry and fast. In no time he was up past the bare aspens and larches and into the high spruce woods.

He came out on the moraine by the lake at sundown. The snow was heavily wind-drifted here. He cut across bare ice and found the front of the cabin buried under a six-foot overhang of snow. It was about dark by the time he'd shovelled in and got a fire going from the big woodpile in back. He was bringing in his second bucket of snow to melt when he heard the *chunka-chunka* of a copter coming through the pass.

It zoomed over the clearing and hovered. Dov could see two heads bobbing around inside. Then it settled down twenty yards away sending a wave of white all over and somebody tumbled out.

The first thing Dov thought of was trouble at home. The next thing was his fire. He had just turned to go put



it out when he realised the chopper was lifting back up.

It went up like a yak in a feather factory. Through the blizzard Dov saw a small pale body floundering toward him.

"Dovy! Dovy! Is that you?"

It was the girl, or at least her voice.

She was stumbling like crazy, up to her crotch in the snow in the fading light. Just as Dov reached her she went down on all fours and all he could see was her little stark-bare pink ass sticking up with a glittery-green thing on one cheek. And about a yard of silver hair.

"Yo ho," he said involuntarily, which is a Stonie indian phrase meaning "Behold!"

She turned up a pretty-baby face with a green jewelbug on the forehead.

"It's you!" she sneezed. Her teeth were chattering.

"You're really not dressed for snow," Dov observed. "Here." He reached down and scooped her up and toted her indoors, snow and green butterflies and rosy ass and all. His frosty pink Christmas cake with a razor-blade inside.

When he got the lamp going she turned out to be as naked in front as she was in back, and about sixteen at the oldest. A kid, he decided, on some kind of spinout. While he wrapped her in his Hudson Bay blanket he tried to recall where he could have met her. No success. He plonked her on the snowshoe chair and built up the fire. She kept sniffing and chattering, but it wasn't very informational.

"Oh, Dovy, Dovy, it's you! D-Dovy! Speak to me. Say something, please, Dovy!"

"Well, for starters—"

"Do you like me? I'm attractive, am't I?" She opened the blanket to look at herself. "I mean, am I attractive to *you*? Oh, Dovy, s-say something! I've come so far, I chartered three jets, I, I,—Oh, Dovy *d-darling*!"

And she exploded out of the blanket into his arms like a monkey trying to climb him, whimpering "Please, Dovy, love me," nuzzling, squirming her little body, shivering and throbbing and pushing cold little fingers into his snow-suit, under his belt. "*Please, Dovy, please, there isn't much time. Love me.*"

To which Dov didn't respond quite as you'd expect. Because it so happened that this cabin had been the prime scene of Dov's early fantasy life. Especially the *winter fantasy*, the one where Dovy was snuggled in the blankets watching the fire gutter out and listening to the storm howl . . . and there comes a feeble scratching at the door . . . and it turns out to be a beautiful lost girl, and he has to take off all her clothes and warm her up *all over* and wrap her up in the Hudson Bay blanket . . . and he's very tender and respectful but *she knows* what's going to happen, and later he does all kinds of things to her on the blanket. (When Dov was fourteen he could only say the words *Hudson Bay blanket* in a peculiar hoarse whisper.) The girl in one version was a redhead named Georgiana Ochs, and later on he actually did get Georgiana up to the cabin where they spent a weekend catching terrible colds. Since then the cabin had been the site of several other erotic enactments, but somehow it never came up to the original script.

So now here he was with the original

script unrolling around him but it still wasn't quite right. In the script *Dov* undressed the girl, *Dov's* hands did the feeling-out. The girl's part called for trembling appreciation, all right. But it didn't call for shinnying up him like a maniac or grabbing his dick in ice-cold paws.

So he stood for a minute with his hands squeezing her baby buttocks, deliberately holding her away from his crotch until something communicated and she looked up, panting.

"Wait, Oh," she gasped, and frowned crossly, apparently at herself. "Please . . . I'm not crazy, Dovy, I—I—"

He walked stiffly across the hearth with her, trying to keep his snowsuit from falling down, and dumped her on the bunk, where she lay flopped like a puppy, with her knees open and her little flat belly going in and out, in and out. There was an emerald butterfly on her ash-blond muff.

"All right," he said firmly (but nicely). "Now look. Who are you?"

Her mouth worked silently and her eyes sent *Love you, love you, love you* up to him. Her eyes didn't seem wild or druggy, but they had a funny deep-down spark, like something lived in there.

"You name, kid. What's your name?"

"L-Loolie," she whispered.

"Loolie who?" He said patiently.

"Loolie . . . Aerovulpa." Somewhere in his head a couple of neurones twitched, but they didn't connect.

"Why did you come here, Loolie?"

Her eyes glistened, brimmed over. "Oh, no," she sobbed, gulped. "It's been so *long*, such a terribly long, long, way—" her head rolled from side to

side, hurtfully. "Oh, Dovy, please, there'll be *time* for all this later, I know you don't remember me—just *please* let me touch you, please—it *hurt* so—"

Soft arms pleading up for him, little breasts pleading with their puckered noses. This was getting more like the script. When Dov didn't move she suddenly wailed and curled up into a fetal ball.

"I've sp-spoiled everything," she wept, burrowing wetly in the Hudson Bay blanket.

That did it, for a nice person like Dov. One of his hands went down and patted little Tarbaby's back, and then his other hand joined the first and his snowsuit fell down. Her back somehow turned into her front and curled up around him, and his knees were feeling the bunk boards while two downy thighs locked around his hips and sucked him in.

And he got a shock.

The shock came a bit late, the shock was wrapped around him and thrusting at him so that he had no choice but to ram on past her squeal—and after that he didn't have time to worry about anything except letting the sun burst in.

But it is a fact that even in Calgary you don't meet many maidenheads. It says something for Dov that he knew the way.

Now, a twentyfirst-century maiden-head isn't a big thing, sociopsychologicalwise. On the other hand, it wasn't a nothing, especially for a nice person like Dov. What it did was to move the episode one step out of the fantasy class—or rather, one step into another fantasy.

Particularly when Loolie said what girls often do, afterward. Looking at

him anxious-humble, stroking his stomach. "Do you mind? I mean, my being a virgin?"

"Well, now," said Dov, trying to think decisively while peeling a squashed green butterfly out of his neck.

"Truly, honestly, did you mind?"

"Honestly, no." He balanced the butterfly on her head.

"It did hurt a *little* . . . Oh, Ooh," she cried distractedly, "Your blanket..."

They were deciding the blanket didn't matter when Loolie looked at her little fingernail and started kissing his stomach.

"Dovy dear, don't you think, couldn't we," she mumbled, "I mean, it's only the first time I ever—try again?"

Dov found himself agreeing.

The second time was infinitely better. The second time was something to challenge fantasy. It was so good that the scrap of Dov's mind that wasn't occupied with the electric baby eeling under and over and around him . . . began to wonder. Virginal fucks did not, in his experience, achieve such loin-bursting poetry, such fitting, such flowing surge to velocities sustained beyond escape, such thrust and burn and build with the ex-virgin sobbing rhythmically, "Love you, Dovy, Do-o-ovy," giving everything to it in the best position of all until all the stages went nova together—

"... Don't sleep yet, Dovy, please wake up a minute?"

He opened one eye and rolled off; he was really a nice person.

Loolie leaned on his chest, worshipping him through her pale damp hair.

"I almost forgot." She grinned, sud-

denly naughty. He felt her hair, her breasts move down his belly, down his thighs and shins to his feet. Sleepily he noted a warm wetness closing over his big toe. Her mouth? Some kind of toe joy, he thought— and then the signal made it six feet back to his brain.

"Hey-y-y!" He smacked her butt. "That hurt! You *bit* me!"

Her face came around laughing. She was really great-looking.

"I bit your big toe." She nodded solemnly. "That's *very important*. It means you're my true love." Her eyes suddenly got wet again. "I love you so, Dovy. Will you remember, I bit your toe?"

"Well, sure I'll remember," he grinned uneasily. The neurones that had twitched sometime back, boosted by stimulation from his toe finally made connection.

"Hey, Loolie. What you said . . . Is your name *Aerovulpa*?"

She nodded slowly.

"*The Aerovulpa*?"

Another nod, her eyes glowing at him.

"Oh god." He tried to remember what he'd seen about it. *Aerovulpa* . . . The Family . . . Mr. *Aerovulpa*, he gathered, was not in tune with the twentyfirst century—maybe not the twentieth, even. And this was an *Aerovulpa* virgin all over his legs. Ex-virgin.

"By any chance is your father sending a private army up here after you, Loolie?"

"Poor Daddy," she smiled. "He's dead." The far beacon in her eyes was coming closer. "Dovy. You didn't ask me my whole name."

"Your what?"

"I'm Loolie Aerovulpa . . . Rapelle."

He stared. He didn't get it at all.

"I don't—are you some kind of relative?"

She nodded, her eyes enormous, weird.

"A very close relative." Her lips feathered his cheek.

"I never met you. I swear."

He felt her swallow. Loolie drew back and looked at him for a couple of long breaths and then glanced down at her little finger. He saw she had a tiny timer implanted in the nail.

"You haven't asked me how old I am either," she said quietly.

"So?"

"I'm seventy-five."

"Huh?" Dov stared. No geriatrics imaginable could—

"Seventy-five years old. I am. Inside, I mean, me, now."

Then he got it.

"You—you—"

"Yes. I'm time-jumping."

"Time-jumper . . . !" He'd heard about it, but he didn't believe it. Now he looked and saw . . . seventy-five years looking out of her baby eyes. Old. The spark in there was old.

Loolie checked the nail again. "I have to tell you something, Dovy." She took hold of his face solemnly. "I have to warn you. It's very important. Darling, don't ever ig-g-g-eugh-gh—"

Her jaws jabbered, her head flopped—and her whole body slumped on him, dead girl.

He scrambled out and had just got his ear on her heartbeat when Loolie's mouth gulped air. He turned his head and saw her eyes open, widen, wander to his body, her body, and back to his.

"Who're you?" she asked, clear and cool. Asking for information.

He drew back.

"Uh. Dov Rapelle." He saw her face, her eyes were so different. She sat up. A stranger teenager was sitting in his bunk, studying him so clinically he reached for the blankets.

"Hey, look!" She pointed at the window. "Snow! Oh, great! Where am I? Where is this?"

"It's my cabin. In Calgary, Alberta. Listen, are you all right? You were time-jumping, I think."

"Yeah," said Loolie absently, smiling at the snow. "I don't remember anything, you never do." She squirmed, looking around and then suddenly squirmed again and said "Oh, my," and stopped looking around. She put her hand under herself and her eyes locked on his.

"Uh . . . Hey—what happened?"

"Well," Dov began, "You, I mean we . . ." He was too nice to blame it all on her.

She bugged her eyes, still feeling herself.

"But that's *impossible!*"

Dov shook his head, no. Then he changed it to yes.

"No," she insisted bewilderedly. "I mean, I've been *hyped*. Daddy had me fixed so I couldn't. I mean, men are *repulsive* to me." She nodded. "Girls too. Sex, it's a nothing. All I do, all I do is *sailing* races. Star class, yick. I'm *so* bored!"

Dov couldn't find a thing to say, he just sat there on the bunk holding the blanket. Loolie put out her hand and touched his shoulder tentatively.

"H'mh." She frowned. "That's

funny. You don't *feel* repulsive." She put her other hand on him. "You feel all right. Maybe nice. Hey this is weird. You mean, we *did* it?"

He nodded.

"Did I, like, *enjoy* it?"

"You seemed to, yes."

She shook her head wonderingly, grinning. "Oh, ho, ho. Hey, Daddy will be wild!"

"Your father?" said Dov. "Isn't he—you said he was dead."

"Daddy? Of course he's not dead." She stared at him. "I don't remember a thing about it. All I remember is being in some big old house, being *seventy-five*. It was awful." She shuddered. "All stringy and creepy. I felt, bleeah. And those weird old people. I just said I was sick and went and lay down and watched the shows. And slept. For two days, I guess. Hey, when is this? I'm hungry!"

"December twenty-ninth," Dov told her dazedly. "Do you do this a lot, time-jumping?"

"Oh no." She pushed her hair back, "Just a few times, I mean, Daddy just *installed* it. I was so bored, I thought, well, it would be nice to give myself a treat. I mean, when I'm *old*, I'll enjoy being sixteen again for a little while, don't you think?"

"I wouldn't know. We don't have anything like that here. In fact, I never believed they existed."

"Oh, they exist." She nodded importantly, frowning at him. "Of course they're *very expensive*. There's only a few in the *world* I guess. Hey, you know, I saw your picture there. By the mirror. I am *so* hungry. There has to

be food here. Sex is supposed to make you hungry, right?"

She scrambled off the bunk, trailing blanket. "I'm starved! Can I help you cook? Oh, my glitterbugs. Oh dear. Is that the *moon*? We're up in real *mountains*?" She ran around to the windows. "Daddy never lets me go anywhere. Oh, mountains are fantastic! Hey, you really do look nice. I mean, being a man isn't so hideous." She spun back to him, nose to nose. "Look, you have to *tell* me all about it." Her eyes slid around, suddenly shy. "I mean, *everything*, God, I'm hungry. Listen, since we, I mean, I don't *remember*, you know. Can't we sort of *try* it over again? Hey, I forgot your name, I'm *sorry*—"

"Loolie," Dov said. He closed his eyes. "Will you please just shut up one minute? I have to think."

But all he could think was that she had a good idea: Food.

So he fried up some corned beef hash, with Loolie all over the cabin like a mongoose, opening the door, smooshing snow on her face, admiring the moon and the mountains, running over to poke him with a spruce twig. When she turned her attention to the fire he was pleased to see that she put the wood on right. They sat down to eat. Dov wanted very much to ask about her father. But he couldn't—being a nice person—break through Loolie's excitement about him, and the mountains, and him, and the cabin, and him, and—

It began to dawn on Dov that this little Aerovulpa had a pretty sad locked-up sliver of the twentyfirst century.

"You ought to see this place when the ice goes out," he told her. "The big melt. And the avalanches."

"Oh, Dovy, I'm so bitched with *people*—places. I mean, nobody *cares* about anything real. Like this is beautiful. Dovy, will you, when I—"

That was when her father's private army came *chunga-chunga* out of the night sky.

Dov scrambled into his suit and discovered that the army consisted of one small hysterical man and one large hairless man.

"Uncle Vic!" cried Loolie. She ran up and patted the small man while the large man showed Dov several embossed badges.

"Your father, your father!" Uncle Vic spluttered, thrusting Loolie away and glaring round the cabin. His eyes focussed on the bunk. The big man stood stolidly by the door.

"Angry, yes!" moaned Uncle Vic. He took off his hat and put it on again and grabbed Dov's snowsuit.

"Do you know who this girl is?" he hissed.

"She says she's Loolie Aerovulpa. She was time-jumping," Dov said, being reasonable.

"I know, I know! Terrible!" The little man's eyes rolled. "Louis—Mr. Aerovulpa—turned it off. How could you do this to him, girl?"

"I haven't done a thing to Daddy, Uncle Vic."

Her uncle marched over to the bunk, grabbed up the blanket, hissed, and threw it on the floor.

"You—you—"

"Daddy had no right to *do* that!" Loolie cried. "It's *my* life. It didn't

work, anyway. I—I love it here, I mean, I think I—"

"No!" the little man shrieked. He scuttled back to Loolie and started shaking her. "Your father!" he yelled. "He will have you psyched, he will have you deleted! Puta! Pffah! and as for you, you—" He whirled on Dov and began to spray old-world discourtesies.

At which point, Dov, although a nice person, was starting to get considerably browned. He recalled coming up here for some peace and quiet. Now he looked at the little man, and the big man, and Loolie, and finished lacing up his boots.

"Getup! Move!" the little man screamed. "You are coming with us!"

"My folks will wonder where I am," Dov objected reasonably, thinking the two men looked like urban types.

"On your feet, felo!" Uncle Vic flapped his hands at the big man, who came away from the door and jerked his head at Dov.

"Get moving, boy." He had one hand in his pocket like an old movie.

Dov got up.

"Okay, but you need some clothes for Miss Aerovulpa, don't you think? Maybe her father won't be so wild if you bring her back dressed."

Uncle Vic glared distractedly at Loolie who was sticking out of her blanket.

"I'll get a snowsuit in the closet," Dov said. He moved carefully toward the woodshed door by the fireplace, wondering if urban types would buy the idea of a closet in a mountain cabin. The big man took his hand out his pocket with something in it pointed at Dov's back, but he didn't move.

Just as Dov's hand reached the latch he heard Loolie's mouth pop open and held his breath. She didn't say anything.

Then he was twisting through the door and yanking out the main brace of the woodpile. Cordwood crashed down against the door while Dov assisted matters by leaping up the pile, grabbing the axe as he went. He scrambled around the eaves onto the lean-to and whipped around the chimney, hearing bangings from below.

From the chimney he launched himself up to the roof-ridge. The big front drift was still there. He rode a snowslide down over the front door, slamming the bar-latch as he landed, grabbed up his skis and was galloping through the drifts to the far side of the helicopter.

The first shots came through the cabin window as he swung his axe at the main rotor bearings. His body was behind the copter and the cabin windows were too small for the big man. When his axe achieved an unhealthy effect on the rotors Dov gave the gas tank a couple of whacks, decided not to bother igniting it, buried the axe in the tail vane and scuttled down the moraine into a private ravine. Glass was crashing, voices bellowing behind him.

The ravine became a long narrow tunnel under the snowbowed spruces. Dov frog-crawled down it until the noise was faint, like coyote pups. Presently the ravine widened and debouched into a steep snowfield. Dov buckled on his skis. The moon rode out of a cloudrack. Dov straightened up and took off down the glittering

white slopes. As he flew along gulping in the peace and quiet, he hoped Loolie would be all right. Vic was her uncle, it had to be okay.

In an hour he had reached the parked snowbus and was headed back to Calgary where *his* uncle, Ben Rapelle, was chief of the RCM mountain patrol.

He felt free.

But he wasn't. Because Loolie—Loolie Number One, that is—had said her last name was Rapelle. And his toe swelled up.

That turned out to be, as she'd also said, very important.

Next morning, after the patrol brought Loolie and Uncle Vic and his enforcer all safe and sound down to Headquarters, Loolie insisted on phoning her psychomed. So when her father, Mr. Aerovulpa, arrived in his private VTO the psychomed was with him.

Mr. Aerovulpa turned out to be quite unlike Uncle Vic, who was actually, it seemed, only a third cousin. For too many generations swarthy Aerovulpa sperm had been frisking into blond Scandinavian-type wombs; the current Mr. Aerovulpa was a tall yellow-grey glacier with a worried, lumpy Swedish face. If he was wild he didn't show it. He appeared only very weary.

"Eulalia," he sighed depletedly in Ben Rapelle's office. That was Loolie's real name and he always called her by it, having no talent for fatherhood. He looked from his only child to the psychomed whom he had employed to ensure a marriageable product.

Now it had all blown up in his face.

"But how . . . ?" asked Mr. Aero-

vulpa. "You assured me, Doctor . . ." His voice was quiet but not warm. "Uncle" Vic shied nervously. They were all standing around the Patrol office, Dov with a socmoc on one foot.

"The time-jump," shrugged the psychomed. He was plump and slightly wall-eyed, which gave him an air of manic cheer. "It was the older Loolie who was in this body, Louis. This older persona was no longer conditioned. You really should have been more careful. What on earth did you want with a thing like that, time-jumping at your age? And the cost, my god."

Mr. Aerovulpa sighed.

"I acquired it for a particular purpose." He frowned abstractedly at the Rapelles. "A very small trip. I wished to observe . . ."

"To see if you had a *grandson*, eh! Eh, eh?" The psyker chortled. "Of course. Well, did you?"

For some reason Mr. Aerovulpa chose to continue this intimate topic. "I found myself at my desk," he said. "On it was a portrait." His bleak eyes searched his daughter, froze onto Dov.

Dov blinked. It had just occurred to him that a securely hyped and guarded virgin might not be otherwise defended from maternity. Loolie sucked in her lower lip, made a face.

The psychomed eyed them both, head cocked.

"Tell me, Loolie, when you came back to yourself, did you find this young man, ah, disgusting? Repellent? The situation was traumatic?"

Loolie smiled at him, wider and wider, swinging her head slowly from side to side. "Oh, no . . . Oh, *no!* It

was fantastic, *he's* fantastic, he's beautiful. Only—"

"Only what?"

Her smile turned to Dov, melted.

"Well, we never, I mean, I wish—"

"All right!" The psychomed held up his hand. "I see. Now, tell me, Loolie. Think. Did you by any chance bite his toe?"

"Uncle" Vic made a noise. Loolie looked incredulous. "Bite his *toe*?" she echoed. "Of course not."

The psychomed turned to Dov and let his gaze sink to the socmoc. "Did she, young man?"

"Why?" asked Dov cautiously. Everybody began looking at the socmoc.

"Did she?"

"I never!" said Loolie indignantly.

"You don't know." Dov told her. "You did, before. When you were seventy-five."

"Bite your toe? What for?"

"Because that was the key cue," said the psychomed. He pulled his ear. "Oh bother. You remember, Louis. I told you."

Mr. Aerovulpa's expression had retreated further into the ice age.

"The idea was not to make you sexless for life, my dear," the psyker told Loolie. "There had to be a cue, a key to undo the conditioning. Something easy but improbable, which couldn't possibly happen by accident. I considered several possibilities. Yes. All things considered, the toe-bite seemed best." He nodded benevolently. "You recall, Louis, you wanted no matrimonial scandals."

Mr. Aerovulpa said nothing.

"A beautiful job of imprinting, if I do say so myself." The psyker

beamed. "Absolutely irreversible, I guarantee it. The man whose toe she bites—" he pointed at Dov, one eye rolling playfully "—or rather, *bit*, she will love that man and that man only so long as she lives. Guaranteed!"

In the silence Mr. Aerovulpa passed one hand over his Dag Hammarskjöld forehead and breathed out carefully. His gaze lingered from Loolie to Dov to Ben Rapelle like a python inspecting inexplicably inedible rabbits.

"It is . . . possible . . . that we shall see more of each other," he observed coldly. "At the moment I trust it is . . . agreeable to you that my daughter return to her schooling. Victor."

"Right here, Louis!"

"You will remain to provide our . . . apologies to these gentlemen and to accomplish any necessary, ah, restorations. I am . . . not pleased. Come, Eulalia."

"Oh, Dovy!" Loolie cried as she was hustled out. Dov's uncle Ben grunted warningly. And the Aerovulpas departed.

But not, of course, permanently.

Came Springtime in the Rockies and with it a very round-bellied and love-lorn teenager, escorted this time by a matron of unmistakable character and hardihood. Dov got out the ponies and they rode up into the singing forests and rainbow torrents and all the shy, free, super-delights of the wild country Dov loved. And he saw that Loolie truly wanted to live there and share his kind of life in addition to being wildly in love with him, and anyone could see that Loolie herself was luscious and radiant and eager and potentially sensible in spots, especially

when it came to getting rid of the matron. And Dov really was a nice person, in spite of his distrust of the Aerovulpa ambiance. (The ambiance was now making itself felt in the form of a phoney demographic survey team snooping all over Calgary.)

So when summer ripened Dov journeyed warily to the Aerovulpa island off Pulpit Harbor, where he soon discovered that the ambiance didn't repel him half as much as Loolie attracted him. Even the nicest young man is not immune to the notion of a beautiful semi-virginal ever-adoring child-bride of great fortune.

"What, ah, career do you plan for yourself?" Mr. Aerovulpa asked Dov on one of his rare appearances on the island.

"Avalanche research," Dov told him, thus confirming the survey team's report. Mr. Aerovulpa's eyelids drooped minutely. The alliances he had contemplated for Loolie had featured interests of a far more seismic type.

"Basically, sir, I'm a geo-ecologist. It's a great field."

"Oh, it's wonderful, Daddy!" sang Loolie. "I'm going to do all his records!"

Mr. Aerovulpa's eyes drifted from his daughter's face to her belly. The Lump was now known to be male. Mr. Aerovulpa had not arrived where he was by ignoring facts, and he was really not a twentyfirst-century man. "Ah," he said drearily, and departed.

But the wedding itself was far from dreary. It was magnificently simple, out on the lawn above the sea with a forcefield keeping off the Maine weather

and an acre of imported wildflowers. The guest list was small, dominated by a number of complicated old ladies of exotic title and entourage among whom the Alberta contingent stood out like friendly grin-silos.

And then everybody went away and left Dov and Loolie for a week to themselves in paradise.

"Oh, Dovy," sighed Loolie on the third day, "I wish I could stay like this the rest of my life!"

This not very remarkable sentiment was uttered as they lay on the sauna solarium glowing like fresh boiled shrimps.

"You just say that because you bit my toe," said Dov. He was thinking about sailing, to which he had recently been introduced.

"I never!" Loolie protested. She turned over. "Hey, you know, I wonder. When did I *actually* meet you?"

"Last Christmas."

"No, that's what I mean. I mean, I came there because I already loved you, didn't I? And that's where I met you. It's funny."

"Yeah."

"I *love* you so, Dovy."

"I love you too. Listen, let's take your big boat out today, should we?"

And they had a wonderful sail on the dancing trimaran all the way around Acadia Park Island and back to a great clam dinner. That night in bed afterwards Loolie brought it up again.

"Unh," said Dov sleepily.

She traced his spine with her nose.

"Listen, Dovy. Wouldn't it be fantastic to live this day over again? I

mean like when we're *old*."

"Hunk-unh."

"Daddy has the jumper right here, you know. I was here over Christmas when I *did* it. That's what the big power plant over by the cove is for, I told you."

"Hunh-unh."

"Why don't we do it tomorrow?"

"Unh," said Dovy. "Hey, what did you say?"

"We could time-jump tomorrow, *together*," Loolie smiled dreamily. "Then when we're old we could be *young* like we are for awhile. Together."

"Absolutely not," said Dov. And he told her why it was an insane idea. And he told her and told her.

"It's dangerous. What if one of us turned out to be dead?"

"Oh, if you're dead nothing *happens*, I mean, you can only switch places with *yourself*. The, the persona something symmetry, I mean, if you're not *there* nothing happens. You just stay here. The book says so, it's perfectly safe."

"It's insane anyway. What about the Lump?"

Loolie giggled. "It would be a great experience for him."

"What do you mean? What if he finds himself with the mind of a six-months embryo while he's driving a jet?"

"Oh, he *couldn't*! I mean, he'd know it was going to happen, because it *did*, you know? So when he got that old he'd sit down or something. Like when I get to be seventy-five I'll know I'll be jumped back here and go and meet you."

"No, Loolie. It's insane. Forget it."

So she forgot it. For several hours.

"Dovy, I *worry* so. Isn't it awful we have to get *old*? Think how great it would be, having a day to look forward to. Being young again, just for a day. For half an hour, even. Isn't it *dreary*, thinking about getting old?"

Dov opened one eye. He had felt thoughts like that himself.

"I mean, we wouldn't miss a few hours *now*. We have so much time. But think when you're, oh, like sixty, maybe you'll be sick or *degenerating*—and you'll know you're going to jump back and feel great and, and go *sailing* and be like we are!"

Loolie was being crafty with that "sailing," she was gripped by the primal dream. Pay now, play later.

"You can't be sure it's safe, Loolie."

"Well, I did it, didn't I? Three times. Nothing goes wrong 'cause you *know* it's going to happen," she repeated patiently. "I mean, when you get there you *expect* it. I found a note I'd written to myself telling me what to do. Like the butler's name was Johan. And my friends. And to say I was sick."

"You could see the future?" Dov frowned. "What happened? I mean, the news?"

"Oh, well, I don't know, I mean I wasn't very *curious*. All I saw was some old house. Like it was partly underground, I guess. But Dovy, you *know* about things, you could sell all the news, even in just like half an hour you could find out what was going on. You could even read your own research, maybe!"

"Hmh . . ."

That wasn't quite the end of it of course. It was the evening of the sixth day when Dov and Loolie came in

from the moonlight on the shore and went hand in hand into Mr. Aerovulpa's quiet corridors. (Which were found unlocked, an out-of-character fact unless it is recalled that Mr. Aerovulpa had glimpsed the future too.) There was a handle set on standby. Loolie threw it and power hummed up beyond a gleaming wall in which was set a kind of air-lock. She swung the lockport and revealed a cubicle inside the wall.

"It's just big enough for all three of us," she giggled, pulling him in. "What do you suppose we'll do, I mean, the old usses who came back here? I mean, we aren't giving them very *long*."

"Ask your son," said Dov fondly, mentally reviewing the exciting things he wanted to find out about THE FUTURE.

So they set the dials that would exchange their young psyches with their older selves forty years ahead, when Dov would be—good god, *sixty-two*. Loolie let Dov be cautious (this first time, she told herself secretly) and he selected thirty minutes, no more. They clasped hands. And Loolie tipped the silent tumblers of the activator circuit, which unleashed the titanic capacitors waiting to cup the chamber in a temporal anomaly, OOOOM!

—And which by a million-to-one chance shot young Dov Rapelle uptime into the lethal half-hour when a coronary artery ballooned and ruptured as he lay alone in a strange city.

And little Loolie Aerovulpa Rapelle returned from a meaningless stroll in a shopping arcade in Pernambuco to find herself holding Dov's dead body on the control room floor.

Because dying any time is an experience you don't survive.

Not even—as Loolie later pointed out to the numerous temporal engineers her father had to hire—not even when it involves a paradox. For how could Dov have died at *twenty-two* if he actually died at *sixty-two*? Something was terribly wrong. Something that had to be fixed, that *must be fixed*, if it took the whole Aerovulpa fortune, Loolie insisted. She went right on saying it because the psychomed had been quite right. Dovy was the only man she ever loved and she loved him all her life.

The temporal engineers shrugged, and so did the mathematicians. They told her that paradoxes were accumu-

lating elsewhere in the society by that time, too, even though only a few supra-legal heavy persons owned jumpers. Alternate time-tracks, perhaps? Or maybe time-independent hysteresis? Paradoxes of course were wrong. They shouldn't happen.

But when one does—who do you complain to?

Which wasn't much help to a loving little girl facing fifty-nine long grey empty years . . . *twenty-one thousand, five hundred and forty-five* blighted days and lonely nights to wait . . . for her hour in the arms of her man on a Hudson Bay blanket.

—JAMES TIPTREE, JR.

(Continued from page 33)

nized them: their jaws were long and their teeth were sharp and still they gleamed silvery with red-brown glints and in that moment when all motion ceased he saw them for what they were, truly.

Saw them to be undines, all of them, salmon-folk, the eternal enemies of the salmon-eating bear.

But *their* skins had been near them in this water all the time. And his was far away, so far away, on land, the land from which he heard clearly now that call which no fright nor chill could stay. Teeth flashed, they rushed, he leaped, caught the shadow which was the overhanging branch, stayed not to watch lest he lose all sway and fall back in, but heedless of roughed skin made his way upside down along the branch till he could be sure there was land beneath.

There on the bank not a hundred steps away stood Corm. The sun was

very far down the sky—how could he have been in the water this long?—the sun was not warm at all upon him now—Corm's cheeks were distended and he wound the great fey horn, and the sky sounded with the trumpet of the great swans and all multitudes of birds, and elk belled in the woods, and red stags, the foxes barked and all creatures sang and sounded.

Arn walked, he staggered, he saw Corm see him and the calling ceased and he walked forward on his knees, only now feeling in loins and all his limbs shaken with sudden gusts of feeling. He saw the dark outline on the grass and he fell forward and laid his hands upon the bearskin.

But it was not that day but the next day that he sat between the shallows and the deeps and slew the salmon by the score.

—TO BE CONCLUDED—

—AVRAM DAVIDSON

ALLOWANCES

BARRY N. MALZBERG

Herewith, Barry Malzberg combines two of his fascinations—the racetrack and apocalypse—in a story about a man who couldn't beat the horses. . .

Illustrated by BILLY GRAHAM

1

FIRST RACE: Six furlongs. For maiden colts and geldings three years old and up. Purse \$4,000; claiming price \$3,500-\$4,000. Allowance one pound for each \$500 reduction in claiming price.

On the date you are talking about, the subject approached me at my post. I work at mutuel window 104 on the second level of the grandstand and there have never been any complaints about my work. I have been there for two years. I do not understand what you want of me but will try to write this down as best I can.

The subject asked me, "What looks good? I can't find anything here; it doesn't look like any of them can win." He was a small man in his early fifties or maybe I am thinking of the late forties; he was wearing a peculiar grey suit with what appeared to be a series of medals on the lapel. I have no recollection of his face but the clothing was unforgettable. "I don't know what to do anymore," he continued. "As you see, I'll take advice from anyone, even a ticket-seller. Even a clerk or a Stevens hot dog lady I will seek advice from.

It doesn't work any more; the whole system is tearing."

I explained to him that under the rules of the State Racing Commission, no advice could be dispensed to bettors and in any event I had no real understanding of horse-racing which mostly bored me. "I should have figured that; it works out. The whole thing is machinery, no personal connection at all but only clerks, humiliation and bureaucracy. Now, in a time I can recall like my boyhood youth, there was a feeling of some personal warmth at the track, some connection, but now they just squeeze the life out of you. There is that murderous take-out which is a plot by the Government to seize and everybody who works here is either promoting his own edge or is a mechanic like you. I can't stand this! I simply can't take it any more!" the subject said and seemed to stagger, to lose his balance; tottered then into the thick wall which so happily separated us; then, his face became suffused with what I would call a rich, gold pallor and he began to speak obscenities which *I will not quote*. "It's murder, it's murder!" he concluded, "and then the machines will reconstitute us as more machines!" He then left my win-

dow rapidly and I have not seen him since. I have had no further contact with him and learned of his subsequent and dreadful acts only through hearsay. Despite your threats I am certified under commission bylaws #111 & #256 and have long since left probationary status.

II

SECOND RACE: Six furlongs. Claiming, \$5000; purse \$4,000. For three year olds and up who have not won any race other than maiden or claiming. Nonwinners of two races allowed three pounds.

I was in the paddock, haltering a horse for the second race. The horse had no chance but I had agreed to run to fill and because the racing secretary had otherwise threatened to make a reduction in stall space. That goes on all the time now at the major tracks; it is all a game of blackmail and the smaller trainer has no prerogatives. But for the big boys they'll do anything. The horse was slightly fractitious and the apprentice boy was looking at him with terror when suddenly the man of whom you talk appeared in the paddock in a highly excited state. I have no idea how he got by the Pinkerton guard; this kind of thing is not my responsibility. I am an assistant trainer; I cannot be responsible for everyone. I find it impossible to recall this man's face but he was wearing a grey suit of high sheen with whole pockmarks of medals running up and down his sleeves; this man (what did he get those medals for?) this man, immediately approached me with a sneering and



offensive expression and said, "tell me the truth, are you going to throw this one too or does he have instructions to run? Give me a break will you: I can't take this no more. If I don't have a winning day today I'm going to destroy the world."

We are not permitted to address the public in the paddock. I kept my eyes averted, concentrating on the apprentice jockey who was now trembling with fear, having heard this and suddenly the man attacked the boy, leaping upon him and bearing him to the ground. "For God's sake!" he said, "this kid is just sixteen years old; he isn't even old enough to realize the power he wields, he doesn't know what he's dealing with. I can't stand this any more" and at that moment, at last, a delayed wave of Pinkertons did appear, bringing the intruder to a kneeling posture before my horse who had reacted to all of this with utter apathy, was now kicking his heels indolently into the turf. "Please," he said, "please; you're the last one to whom I can appeal: the horse, the central figure, the object of all desire: give me a break and run, will you?" At this point the Pinkertons prevailed, dragging that obvious lunatic out of the paddock and I was able to continue with the saddling procedures. More and more, the barriers between public and participant seem to have broken and unless the Racing Commission severely tightens its rules and regulations I see no future for the sport.

The horse ran fifth and with a little luck might have been third but the jockey made his move too early and had nothing left at the finish. I had

no money on him. I recall nothing else of these events.

III

THIRD RACE: Six furlongs. 'The Little Flower.' Purse \$6,500. For nonwinners of three races other than maiden or claiming, fillies and mares three years old. Allowances, for nonwinners of two races five pounds, for nonwinners of one, seven pounds.

The guy comes up to me and asks for two frankfurters hold the mustard which is fair enough although not necessarily so; nuts now being all over the place who will then ask you to put it on after all and stiff you for a tip and before I can even get them going asks for an opinion on the third; I tell him that I have no opinion and work in this particular Stevens joint only because of certain disastrous experiences many years ago which need not concern him. "You got to tell me: who knows whether the basic wisdom of metaphysics might be in the hands of a Stevens frankfurter man," he says, "and besides, I have just fled some dangerous and tough Pinkertons who are now prowling the grandstand looking for me. My powers are limited, even mine, and I cannot indulge in conversation. Can you give me a winner or not?" and then makes some threatening gestures to me over the counter. "I am no ordinary racing fan," he says, "but a displaced alien who came to your planet many years ago and attempted to work out the secret of metaphysical relation of the races through the manipulation of figures and horses but it doesn't work any-

more; none of this works and I can't stand it. Can you give me a tip? Give me a tip!" he screams. There are several hundred people on line of course; I can hardly say that we are isolated. "Give me a tip or I'll blow up your planet!" he shouts and leans toward me with ooze coming out all of the spaces on his cheeks and I am frantic, absolutely frantic, none of the union regulations cover this and then he begins to shake me like a hot dog in a roll, hold the mustard: up and down, back and forth, his arms having surprising strength due to the many medals I see sewn on them and my forehead hits the counter meaning that I remember nothing more. I am not responsible for any of this: like Art Rooney, the famous owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers football team. I went out to make a score at the races thirty years ago and it is neither my fault or his that it did not work out that way. Now I am merely a witness.

IV

FOURTH RACE: One mile. 'The Grand Circuit.' Purse \$7,500. Allowances. For two year olds who have not won other than maiden or claiming races.

We lost him. Somehow he slipped us coming through the paddock and made a break for the grandstand. We sprinted but he beat it around a corner. I had no idea he was so fast; he didn't look nimble. We did the best we could and it is not my fault that he got away. Security at the top levels should be tighter: people like that should not be allowed into the track. I thought that the known undesirables were held up

at the gates anyway; obviously the crew in that area are not doing their job. There is no reason why they should: only stiffs and pensioners work the gates. Inside is a job for real men, not that I'm not looking forward to my retirement in only six more years; this is make-believe for real police and every time you even take out your weapon you got to fill out a whole form of explanations.

V

FIFTH RACE: Seven furlongs. For three year old colts and geldings who have never won a stakes or handicap other than Breeder's Specials. Purse \$5,000. Scale weights.

I didn't know how he got in. The Racing Secretary's office is closed and locked on Saturday: I was only in there trying to get an early start on the new condition book. Somehow he materialized; I know that this is not a logical explanation but security in the office is very tight due to the wave of attacks upon my predecessor some years ago, which hastened his retirement. I am unable to detail his personal appearance or characteristics, having been too shaken by the events to want to keep them in mind. Furthermore . . . furthermore, I want to put down on the record my strong objections toward filing this statement; my position is fairly responsible and well-paying and the attitude of the authorities here, linking me with common Pinkertons, hot-dog vendors and assistant trainers is insulting.

"I'm a horseplayer," he said in a high state of agitation. "That's what I am,

a common horseplayer. Confront me. Do you believe?"

"You are not allowed in these offices. These offices are restricted to members of the racing commission, the Jockey Club, and to authorized trainers. Please leave at once."

"Confront me!" he shouted. "I'm what it's all about. I'm the man who keeps the whole thing going, the little guy on the rail, the common stiff in the toilet trying to dope them out while squeezing a twenty-five cent tipped turd. I'm the one who makes the wheels move."

"I have nothing to do with that," I said. "I am the racing secretary and ask you to leave before I call in the Pinkertons."

"That won't do any good," he said vaguely. "I took care of them already. Listen, racing secretary," he said, his mood now shifting subtly and in alteration; now he was no longer aggressive but somehow pleading, wistful, "listen, I don't mean to be offensive: I respect your position, it's just that things have been pretty bad lately and now I can no longer keep it in focus. It isn't funny any more, the whole situation I mean, and now it's out of control. For God's sake then, give me a break: tell me who's going to win this next race. I know that you write the races especially for the trainers, set up the conditions, so that there's always a race one of them can win. That's the system; I don't object. I've got to get a winner."

"I have nothing to do with results," I said, perhaps a shade haughtily. My job is statistical and scientific. I don't even know the horses."

His momentary control lapsed and

his face turned a rich, golden brown, a color I have rarely seen in horseplayers, many of whom are anglo-saxionate. "I knew it," he screamed, "that I couldn't get any help from you. You're part of the damned conspiracy too. You weren't worth it, none of you were worth it; I took it seriously from the beginning and I never had to. I'm going to get you, you sons of bitches," he said. "I'm going to fix your wagon once and for all, how much of a losing streak can I take?" and with that vanished or dematerialized; it is difficult to decide which, flicking out of existence and for all I know, right out of my offices because I did not see him again and can take none of the responsibility for subsequent events. There is a noxious element more and more pervasive at the track; the quick buck fantasy has overtaken a larger proportion of the population as frustrations and racial tensions increase, as the environment collapses, and when these aggressions are loosed at the track it becomes something other than the gentle sport it was born to be. This is a theory I have developed. I was within my rights to dismiss him as a crank. I did not overly concern myself. I am a busy man. I have races to run; trainers to content.

VI

SIXTH RACE: One mile. 'The Last Chapter.' For three year olds and up; purse \$15,000. Fillies and mares who have never won two stake or handicap races. Scale weights.

He said that he was from somewhere out of the universe, another planet

maybe, and it was his job to pick winners and if he didn't pick winners something bad would happen to his part of the Universe but a superior alien mind should be able to make hash out of any figures and it all looked like aces to him and he didn't think he would have this kind of trouble at all except he couldn't get a winner for the life of him and it wasn't his fault but someone else's and he was raving about criminals and the percentage break but I didn't listen to this because my job as a Harry M. Stevens men's room attendant is demanding and responsible by the fifth or sixth when the customers really begin to come in heavy to throw up or empty their bowels and I've got to take them to booths and keep the towels coming and I don't pay no heed to what they say because it's always the same thing so I didn't pay much attention to him except to ask if he wanted a booth and when he said that he hadn't come in for no booth but for one simple moment of 'communion' I had no choice but to throw him out. The union will protect me against further harassment.

VII

SEVENTH RACE: One mile and a quarter. 'The Bridle and the Bit.' \$150,000 added sweepstakes for three year old colts and geldings. Scale weights.

No origin. No sense of placement, he was simply there. Once at Lincoln Downs I saw one of them vault the rail and stagger across the stretch, just being missed by a pack of horses but this one didn't jump or drop: he was merely *present*; standing, posturing, his

hands on his hips about fifty yards down range, shouting, waving his hands. It was a bad instant: trouble on the track is always bad although with most of it you don't even have a chance to evaluate before you're either badly hurt or out of it: this time we had three or four seconds to make adjustments and I was able to duck the inside, clear him by several feet. The field split right and left, keeping him in a pocket. That move might have cost me on the board.

I was outside, two wide and moving, the colt showing a little late run for once and we were just starting to roll when I had to pull him up . . . and he quit, just lost his action altogether the way these cheap three year olds will if they get frustrated or blocked. We came in seventh or eighth, the race opening ahead of us like a fan, we the hand on the fan, waving it, and the guy somewhere in back of us still shouting, "You sons of bitches, there's no way to connect with it; you just run over the earth forever!" and so on; I heard that shout and then something about blowing the whole thing up because this had been our last chance absolutely but I was pulling up along the clubhouse turn by then and heard nothing else. The press considers me to be the most articulate of the newer generation of jockeys; I have done my best to fill this out as you wanted but have nothing else to say except to hope that security can be tightened. There is no excuse for this. One of the jockeys could have been hurt very badly. The horses too.

VIII

EIGHTH RACE: Six furlongs. For colts

and geldings that have never won two races other than maiden or claiming. Claiming price \$6,500; purse \$5,000.

All I am trying to do is to get a line on the race. I am already fifty dollars in the hole and sinking fast: life savings, self-esteem, possibility, when the guy is at my elbow saying he wants to talk to me. No one *asks* to talk to you at the track. I ignored him and stayed with the Telegraph. The events of the day in addition to making me poverty-stricken have been very confusing and senseless and I have no patience this late in the game for polite nuts. "Pardon me," he says, "how long have you been playing the horses?"

"About thirty years, man or boy. But that's not really any of your business."

"Everything is my business. Are you ahead? I mean, have you made money in the long run?"

"No," I said. "I'm losing. In the long run everybody always loses."

He really took me by surprise, his questions I mean, or I would have levelled with him. I might have told the truth anyway but it had been a bad day: the kind of day that by the eighth race leaves you feeling limp and foolish and deserving of almost any of the crap that they hand to you, not that I expect this to work in my defense. I have no defense. "It's a percentage game," I said, "if they knock one-fifth out of your pocket before every race, how far can you get?"

"Then pardon me," he said, "if I may ask, why do you play the horses? If it's really as hopeless as you say."

"Why?" I said and looked down at the program, then across the track to

the tote which was winking dangerously rising odds on the horse I wanted to bet, "Well, why not? What the hell else is there? At least here you know what the percentages are; nothing's concealed."

"I figured that," he said with a slow nod. "I mean, I should have figured that out all the time but I never did until now. It isn't anybody's fault."

"So leave me alone," I said. "I got a race to play."

"Will you lose?"

"Probably. Very probably. In the long run, I always lose."

"I'm sorry," he said, "I'm truly sorry friend for losing my temper back there but now I'm truly calm, truly poised. I have an insight: circumstances at last overwhelm and leave me free to think. I will take you from your troubles."

"What's that?"

"I will relieve you. Like a cloud. Is that your expression? No matter for idiom. It was all my fault, I see that now. I was arrogant. I was stupid. I did not understand for too long that it was a test. I was simple-minded and thought that they were giving me a real chance. Now I will solve your misery and lead you to a grace higher than pain."

"How's that?"

"No matter; your expressions become more and more foreign as I recover my true self. Now I approximate the individual that I was. All of it is over, I will set things right. I have survived. I'm sorry."

"Come back here," I said, "come back," five minutes after he had left and I realized how crazy he was, "come back and lay some more of that talk

(Continued on page 128)

As mankind invents and devises ever more terrifying and annihilating weapons, our minds retreat from the inconceivable reality, back into comforting myth and superstition—to astrology and tarot decks. But what if myth becomes reality, as we approach—

THE BRINK

BOB SHAW

LONG BEFORE HE AWOKE Charlent was troubled by a thin, persistent whistling sound which insinuated itself into his dreams. Plaintive and lonely, it seemed to originate in one of the nightmarish half-universes he sometimes visited while asleep—but, even when the buzzer beside the bed had sounded and he was stripping off his pyjamas, it was still audible. It furled through his thoughts like a polar wind.

He tried to forget the sound while he was showering and using the shaver. *This is England*, Charlent reminded himself. *My first time here*. But when he looked out into the pre-dawn darkness there was nothing to see but a single greenish light attached, incongruously, to the blank wall of a steel-framed building; and he could have been on any airbase, anywhere. He put on his uniform quickly, noting that his fingers were trembling with cold as he knotted his tie. Apparently it was too early for the heating system to have come on.

The corridor outside his room was narrow and unfamiliar. Charlent got a sudden conviction that the messroom would not even be in this building, that the Spartan British would make him

face the darkness outside before he got a cup of coffee. This fear subsided when he smelled frying ham and was able to follow the aroma to its source through a complex of low-ceilinged passages. Several men in Royal Air Force uniform passed him and saluted silently, watchfully. When he reached the messroom the slim, black-haired figure of his co-pilot, Ovens, was already seated at a long table. There was nobody else in the room.

"Look at this, Charly." Ovens sounded awed. "Real linen. Real silver. I'll bet they serve toasted crumpets here in the afternoons." Ovens shook his head in pleased wonderment.

Charlent sat down. "Ever been to England before?"

"No, but I think I would like it. I go for stuff like this old silver."

"It's a wonderful country—old silver and Sundogs."

Ovens shrugged. "We could have produced our own Sundogs. The British build 'em and we deliver 'em. It shows Western solidarity."

"I'll bet Peking's impressed."

"You shouldn't talk like that, Charly."

"Why not?"

Ovens shook his head and sat staring down at his plate while Charlent ordered breakfast from a white-jacketed steward. *We almost did it just now*, Charlent thought. *Almost spoke about the unspeakable. Now we're sitting here trying not to think about the unthinkable.*

The big question hanging over these initial Sundog delivery flights was whether or not a nuclear device which yielded its energy over a period of years instead of microseconds would be regarded by the Communist bloc as a "weapon" in the classical sense of the word. Planting miniature suns on jungle supply routes, making them impassable, was a new way of waging war, but the intention was as ancient as warfare itself. And if the Chairman chose to equate the placing of Sundogs with a conventional nuclear attack...

Later, after the long and complex flight briefing, Charlent stepped outside to a cold gray morning and air which was heavy with the tang of mists and dew and dank woodlands beyond the perimeter fence. It was a smell which even the pervasive odor of aviation fuel could not overcome, and somehow it made him feel uneasy. He climbed into the waiting jeep with Ovens, and they were driven out across the airfield and into the shadow of the waiting transport aircraft.

"I've been flying in that thing for more than a year now," Ovens said. "And it still looks like a set from 'The Shape of Things to Come'."

"*'Icarus'* is a big ship, all right." Charlent spoke in a preoccupied voice—he had just become aware of the peculiar whistling sound again.

"Yeah—no wonder they call it the Aluminum Overcast."

The sad, shrill sound was louder as Charlent walked to the rear loading ramp and looked into the aircraft's gargantuan interior. He discovered it was coming from the Sundog—a boil-off of liquid oxygen escaping from a vent in the house-sized cooling sleeve which restrained the captive sun from creating its own dawn.

'Icarus' taxied out onto Brize Norton's runway 08, took off and climbed away on an eastern course, bound for Cyprus which was its first staging post on the route to Cambodia. With a normal load the aircraft could have completed the entire journey in one hop, but the Sundog was too heavy, displaced too much fuel.

During the climb to cruising height the engines drowned out the insistent whistling, but as soon as Charlent had reduced power and trimmed the ship for level flight he heard the weapon's song once more. *You should have been alive to see this day, John Foster Dulles*, he thought. *Brinkmanship was in its infancy in your time.* His depression and unease grew more intense. In the right-hand seat, Ovens began to doze, leaving Charlent alone with his thoughts.

Five hours later the aircraft had left the northern mists and cloud behind, and Charlent was staring ahead into a painfully blue Mediterranean sky. Ovens was still asleep on the right, whilst behind him the navigator seemed absorbed by his radio. Charlent turned to borrow a cigarette from the engineer, but the fourth seat was

empty. The engineer was probably in the galley or checking on the cargo lashings. In another half-hour they would be letting down for Akrotiri.

Charlent looked forward again. The clear, rich blue of the sky merged into a light haze on the horizon, and he narrowed his eyes to get a first glimpse of the island which would soon come into view. At first there seemed to be no focussing point on the prehistoric horizon.

Suddenly he thought he saw another aircraft—or was it two? There seemed to be a pair of minute specks in the eye-pulsing distance, one at roughly his own height, the other well below.

It was impossible to judge distance or to pick out any detail, so he switched the weather radar on to verify the visual contact—but there was no response on the tube. He looked out again and had difficulty in locating the objects. His eyes searched the sky and then he saw one. It was a tiny speck, many hundreds of feet below his aircraft and apparently quite close now. To Charlent's practiced eyes it seemed very small, and an odd shape for an aircraft.

He scanned the blue anxiously for the other object, and found it—dead ahead and perhaps only two hundred feet above him. Charlent felt his mouth distort with shock. The thing he was looking at was no small aircraft. It was more like a free-fall parachutist, but with a pair of wings strapped to his back—something like the old photographs he had once seen of Valentin, the French birdman.

The birdman was flying—or soaring—in the same direction as the aircraft and Charlent could see him quite

clearly now. He was lightly dressed, no flying overalls, but wearing an odd helmet. There was no indication of a parachute pack. His wings had a definite shape like those of a huge soaring buzzard, and for a moment Charlent thought he could see the outline of long feathers at the wingtips.

The freighter was speeding below the birdman when he looked down, obviously startled by the roar of the jets. He turned sharply and momentarily lost control, side-slipping violently into the aircraft's path. Charlent froze. There was nothing he could do to help—his massive ship could not respond in time to even the most violent control demand—and the man plummeted down just behind the starboard wing. As the figure slid out of sight Charlent saw him tumble hopelessly out of control, his wings flapping jerkily, seemingly torn.

Charlent pulled the freighter into a tight starboard turn, overriding the autopilot.

"What's going on?" Ovens shouted, awakening with a start.

"I thought we hit a skydiver."

"A skydiver? You're crazy, Charly."

"I tell you I saw a man out there."

Charlent told what he had seen as they searched the haze below.

They saw nothing. The coast of Cyprus soon came into view and they nosed down the invisible highway of the glidepath. After some discussion during their inspection of the aircraft for damage, they decided to file a near-miss report of an "unidentified object, possibly a very light aircraft." But there was no confirmation from either Cyprus or Crete air traffic con-

(Continued on page 88)

AGONY AND REMORSE OF RHESUS IX OVA HAMLET

Richard Lupoff, who masterminds these things, tells us that Ova Hamlet's last travesty to appear within these pages, "The Horror South of Red Hook" (February, 1972), was produced as a 35-minute dramatization over San Francisco's radio station KPFA, "complete with spooky music, canned sound effects, etc." The sixth in Ova Hamlet's series of parodies will ring familiar changes for readers of Philip K. Dick's surreal novels of the last decade . . .

Illustrated by DAVE COCKRUM

THE CERTAINTY of an unpleasant jabbing in his sore ribs penetrated C. M. Peck's slumber and dragged him reluctantly from dream-disturbed oblivion into full and miserable wakefulness. He rubbed the grit from his red, itchy eyes and glared across the double bed at his wife.

It was Loris Peck's sharp elbow that had awakened him. As soon as she saw his eyes open she gave one extra jab and climbed out of bed. "I suppose you have to get up now and go to your office," Loris said.

Peck looked at the cuckoo chronograph over the dresser. It was almost seven o'clock. He'd have to hurry or he'd miss the steam jitney and have to take a cab to work. He couldn't afford to do that. "Right," he said.

Loris carried her smock into the bathroom with her and reemerged carrying her pyjamas, the smock hanging loosely from her shoulders to her shins.

"Last night you were too tired," she said. "This morning there's no time. That job takes so much out of you, it's a wonder they don't pay you any better than they do. You ought to talk to that bitch Olivia and. . ."

But Peck was already halfway downstairs, pulling his sand trousers tight around the tops of his shoes so the gritty dry sand of Rhesus IX would be kept out. He stopped in the kitchen and picked up a piece of toast that had been drying since the night before. He held a cup under the faucet and turned the handle but the water was off again.

The dry toast made him gag but it would provide strength for the morning.

Before he left the house he turned back toward the stairs that led to the bedroom where his wife was making banging noises. "I'm sorry, Loris," he began. "I'm sorry there wasn't time this morning but maybe tonight—" he

choked on the dry toast and stopped talking. He ran back into the kitchen and stuck his mouth under the faucet before he remembered there was no water again this morning.

He ran to the front door and out into the dry, chill air of Rhesus IX. The sky was its customary murky gray, the sun had risen and was sending its rays down, weak and watery, through the depressing atmosphere of the planet.

Why did we ever come here? Peck asked himself. *In fact, why did they ever start a colony on Rhesus IX?* Maybe it was a sinister plot of some sort, or a test. Sometimes his existence didn't even seem real. Other times it did. On occasion it seemed both real and unreal simultaneously.

How could that be? Peck wondered.

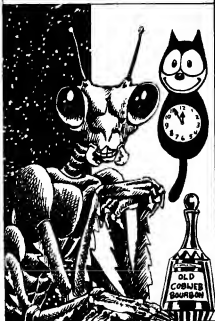
As he sprinted down the cracked flagstone path from his house he tripped over an irregular corner of rock and fell onto the so-called lawn where sickly mutated crabgrass struggled unsuccessfully for a foothold in the sandy grit. A sand-bonker popped out of its concealed den and bit him on the wrist.

"Ouch!" C. M. Peck shouted, grabbing his injured wrist with his other hand. That really smarted. He climbed to his feet and stood holding his wrist. Before his eyes it began to swell, puff, pustulate and ache.

He screamed an obscenity at the sand-bonker and began jumping up and down on the spot where it had disappeared back into the gritty soil, even though he knew it would be far away by now.

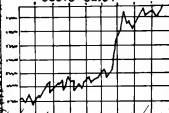
Up and down the street windows began to open and men and women leaned out their windows to see what

RHESUS IX COLONY BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS



UNEXPLAINED DEATHS

00073-02904



with deaths throughout the Rhesus IX colony. It was Peck's job to perform statistical analyses of the causes of death in the colony. He used a computer to process the data. Lately the computer had shown an anomaly in the area of mysterious fatalities. The number of deaths with no known cause had risen from less than two per cent to almost fifteen per cent.

Also, a lot of the corpses were found with mysterious green coloration of the ears.

Peck didn't know what it meant. He had tried to get his boss, Olivia Sampson Thompson, and her boss, L. Bartlett Bailey, to take an interest in the anomaly. They were not interested.

Olivia Sampson Thompson was also Peck's former mistress and the mother of his child. Paulie Peck. L. Bartlett Bailey was Olivia Sampson Thompson's current lover.

Barney Plambeck hissed at C. M. Peck. Peck looked at him. "Hey, Peck," Barney said, "Olivia wants to talk to you."

Peck groaned. He put his work neatly into a manila folder with a circular coffee stain on the cover and carried it into his supervisor's cubicle.

Olivia Sampson Thompson looked at him and he looked at her. "Did you want to talk about the anomalies in the death statistics?" C. M. Peck asked.

Olivia shook her head negatively. With carefully manicured fingers she adjusted her black-rimmed eye glasses. Her hair was pulled tight on her head. Her clothing was a natty, man-tailored suit. Her face was beautiful in a cold, discouraging way.

"The number of unexplained deaths

has increased from under two per cent to over fourteen per cent," Peck said, feeling a twinge in his sore ribs. Maybe it would be worth twice as many sore ribs to have them jabbed every other morning instead of every morning. "And there are those mysteriously green-tinted ears. I think the future of Rhesus IX colony may be at stake. I wonder what the purpose of Rhesus IX colony is."

"That isn't what I want to talk to you about," said Olivia.

"All right," said Barney. "Listen, I can't keep up at the salary the Bureau pays me. Do you think you could talk to Mr. Bailey about an increase for me?"

"That isn't it either," said Olivia, "and besides, you know we have a merit pay system here and if you want more money you just have to do better work. Tend to business and stop pestering people about those silly green ears."

"What I want to talk to you about is Paulie."

"Paulie?" Peck said. "What about Paulie?"

"You're two months behind on child support payments," Olivia said sneeringly. "If you don't come up with six dollars within a week, I'm going to get a court order putting you in jail."

"Six dollars!" Peck said. "I don't have any money at all, and you know I don't make that kind of money. Have a heart, Olivia," he pleaded. His ankle hurt and he looked around for a chair but there was none in Olivia Sampson Thompson's office. So he leaned against the wall. His bitten hand hurt. So did his crushed fingers that the cab

driver had slammed the door on. He wished he had a drink of G&D Vermouth.

He looked out the window. The weak sun had disappeared in the west and the sky was getting dark. It had been a very short day. He hadn't even had lunch. He had a headache. His twisted ankle was throbbing and his sore ribs bothered him. He wished he had a drink.

The Chairman Mao electric clock on the wall of Olivia Sampson Thompson's office sounded its gong. The intercom on her desk buzzed. She leaned close to it. A voice came out. Peck couldn't tell what it said.

Olivia Sampson Thompson said, "Yes, sir," to the intercom. She looked nastily at Peck. "Mr. Bailey wants to see you," she said, "about the statistical anomalies. You better go see him right now."

Peck picked up his folder with the circular coffee stain on the cover. He started to refold the cover so the stain wouldn't show but the inside of it had a scatological cartoon that someone had drawn on it so he left it with the stain showing and tried to cover it with his hand. His eyes were tired. His throat was sore from the dry toast he'd had for breakfast that had made him gag. A drink of Barefoot Bynum Mead would be nice.

He hobbled down the corridor to Bailey's office, favoring his sore ankle, wrist, fingers, ribs, throat, and eyes. He wished he had a drink of Old Cobweb Bourbon. He wondered why Rhesus IX existed.

He knocked on the frosted glass door of L. Bartlett Bailey's office and was admitted by Bailey's secretary, a beau-

tiful woman named Ellamarie Kensington.

Ellamarie sneered at Peck. He said, "I have to talk to Mr. Bailey." He stood on one foot, resting his sprained ankle. He started to topple over, reached to grab Ellamarie Kensington for support. She danced nimbly out of the way. He hit his forehead on the edge of her desk.

She said, "Go in, Mr. Bailey's been waiting for you." She sneered.

Peck wished he had a drink of Sterno.

He hauled himself back to his feet, using his sore hands to do so. There was a carafe of water on Ellamarie's desk. He reached for it.

"Right away, Mr. Peck," Ellamarie snapped, grabbing the carafe from his injury-weakened grasp.

Peck went into Bailey's office. Bailey was Olivia's current lover. Peck cleared his throat. It hurt. His eyes watered a little. He said, "Mr. Bailey—"

"Call me Bart," said Bailey. "I want to talk to you. Listen, Peck, all of these reports of unexplained deaths and green ears have created a stir back on Earth and they want me to check it out with you.

"Cut it out. Don't rock the boat. Leave sleeping dogs lie. Don't borrow trouble. Leave well enough alone. Do you follow me? Don't meddle. Keep your fingers out of this. Effective today you get a ten per cent pay reduction. If you don't stop prying you just might lose your job altogether. Then where will you be?"

C. M. Peck gulped painfully. Outside Bailey's window the sun shone fitfully in gray, watery rays.

"Here," Bailey said, opening a

drawer in his desk. "You don't look so good. Sit down."

Peck sat down in a chair facing Bailey. "Thank you, Mr. Bailey," he said.

"Bart," said Bailey.

Peck grunted.

Bailey reached into the open drawer of his desk. He removed a bottle of Sakura Plum Wine. "Have some of this," he said. He reached across the desk, handing Peck the bottle of plum wine, a glass, and a napkin. "Don't spill the wine," Bailey said, "and if you do, wipe it up."

Peck drank some wine. It tasted bad.

"How do you feel now," Bailey asked. "Better? Good! Now, I want you to take this home with you and swallow it before you go to bed."

Peck did.

In the morning he woke up without being jammed in the ribs. Loris was sitting on the edge of the bed with a breakfast tray in her hands. It had eggs on it, imported orange juice, artificial coffee, toast with jam. She was wearing a filmy peignoir. She smiled at Peck as he took the tray, laid her hand on his for a moment, then disappeared.

He strolled past his immaculate green lawn, down the street to the jitney stop. The steam jitney pulled up just after Peck arrived. The driver swung the door open, said, "Good morning, Mr. Peck."

Peck climbed aboard, answered the driver with a friendly greeting, found a comfortable seat and rode to his office. At the building where he worked he walked under the archway with the engraved letters on it. It said "Bureau of Vitla Statsitics."

He wondered why it was spelled that way. It was a good thing that we had

this neat-o colony here on Exmore IX, though, that was for sure.

He went into his office. Barney Plambeck stood up as he entered. Barney was tall and handsome, almost as tall and good looking as Peck himself. They were the two brightest young men in the entire Bureau of Vitla Statsitics. Peck was even brighter.

Plambeck said, "Mr. Bailey asked you to come into his office as soon as you got here, Peck." He grinned in a friendly manner.

Peck walked past Olivia Sampson Thompson's office. She had her back to the door, bending over her desk. Peck smacked her smartly on the rump. She said "OOh," and turned around. As soon as she recognized Peck her expression became one of joy. "Oh, I wish you'd pay attention to me more often," she said. "I get so lonely, and little Paulie would love to see daddy more often, too."

She leaned softly against him, the movement rearranging the folds of her blouse so that her cleavage was exposed to Peck's eyes.

"Some other time," he said. "Do you have that folder ready?"

Olivia pouted, handed him a spotless manila record jacket with a neatly typed label affixed to the front. It said "Unexplained deaths, 00073-02904."

"Mr. Bailey says that your work has been brilliant. He's putting you in for a promotion on Earth. Oh, C. M., it would be so lovely. . . ."

Peck took the folder, strode down the corridor to Bailey's office, rapped smartly on the door, swung it open with his smartly clothed and manicured hand, and stepped inside.

Suddenly his ribs hurt him. Also his

ankle. One wrist was painfully swollen from a sand-bonker bite, and his fingers throbbed. He wished he had a drink of Kirin Beer.

"Come in," Bailey snapped. "Close the door. Have a seat. Let me see what you have." He extended his hand.

Shaking painfully, Peck turned the folder over to him. He saw a large, circular coffee stain on its cover, partially obliterating the sloppily hand-lettered label.

Bailey grunted, looked distastefully at the folder and then raised his eyes contemptfully at Peck. "Listen, Peck," he said.

But he got no further. There was a pause as he stared at Peck. "Good lord!" he gasped, dropping the folder in the waste basket and backing away from Peck.

Peck looked in the mirror on the wall

near the Scarlet Pimpernel hour glass. Green ears.

"Why is all this happening?" he asked.

When he looked back at Bailey, his boss was grinning at him. His teeth were flashing metallically, stainless steel with bits of scrambled egg caught between them.

"Here," Bailey said, reaching into his desk drawer.

"No," Peck said, backing away.

"Haven't you figured it out yet?" Bailey asked, nastily.

"It's not real," Peck moaned. "It can't be!"

"No," the insectoid replied. "Nothing is, you know."

"Is this where it ends?" Peck screamed, his heart beating wildly.

"Isn't it always?"

—OVA HAMLET

(Continued from page 81)

trol centers of any fixed-wing, helicopter or known flying machine in the area.

That night Charlent slept in a hotel far from the airfield—but it seemed to him that, in the warm darkness, he could still hear the Sundog's whistle. He awoke several times, rigid with fear, convinced that some ghastly, irretrievable blunder had been committed, and that the megadeaths were coming...

Next morning he awoke early, glad to escape the night, and went to the airfield much earlier than necessary. As he walked below the vast umbrella of the tailplane he met Jackson, the flight

engineer, and a local maintenance fitter.

"You were right, Charly," Jackson said. "It must have been a bird—we found these in the horn balance hinge."

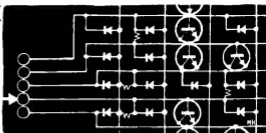
He held out two large feathers, twisted and bent. Charlent took them cautiously—they were smeared with some sort of grease. As he looked down at them he became aware of the Sundog's endless song, and in the depths of his mind myth-memories began to stir. He ran his fingers over the feathers again.

Were they covered with grease—or wax?

—BOB SHAW

**ALEXEI & CORY
PANSHIN**

**SF
in
Dimension**



MASTERY OF SPACE AND TIME (1926-1935)

TO READERS STARVED FOR speculative fantasy, the original sf that Hugo Gernsback began to publish in the late Twenties was a fabulous bounty. The letter columns of the early *AMAZING* and *Science Wonder Stories* are filled with cries of gratitude, with declarations of the genius of his authors, and with forthright acknowledgment of the immortality of the stories they wrote: "I place this writer in a class with Edgar Rice Burroughs and H.G. Wells and others of the peak of the profession. Ed Earl Repp is without a doubt a 'find'." And, "I really don't know whether to call Dr. Keller the greatest science fiction genius of all time or a diabolical fool. But the fact remains that the first installment of 'The Human Termites' has permeated my conscious self as no other literary effort has done. It is all I think of during the day and all I dream of at night."

But these early masterpieces have not aged well. Most are patterned after the comparatively house-bound Wells of the early short stories. They are didactic stories set against realistic contemporary backgrounds, and they chronicle the intrusion or the unleashing of a strange but well-bounded power. Or they wave in passing at a possible alien, like Fitz-James O'Brien. Or they dip a toe into a possible other realm and hastily withdraw it. They

seem timid and tentative. They are without question clumsy, crude and ill-written. Their backgrounds are now dated by the passage of forty-five years, and their imaginative elements have since been better stated and more thoroughly explored.

In the *Cole Checklist of Science Fiction Anthologies*, there are nearly 2700 stories listed as having been anthologized through 1963. Of these, only twenty-three were first published in *AMAZING* or *Science Wonder* before 1930. And only twenty-seven more—a grand total of fifty stories—were first published through 1933 in *AMAZING*, or *Wonder Stories*, or the Clayton *Astounding*. In fact, the anthologies in which the majority of these stories were reprinted have themselves been out of print for twenty years. With the passing of anthologists like Groff Conklin who first encountered sf in the Gernsback magazines, it seems likely that these crude early stories will be left to gently crumble away until the academicians find them and bring them to light again.

Some of the special flavor of these early speculative fantasies will be evident in the ring of their titles: "The Colloidal Nemesis," "The Four-Dimensional Roller Press," "Hornets of Space," "The Incredible Monstrosity," "The Man Who Evolved," "The Revolt of the Pedes-

trians," "Spawn of the Stars," "The Ultimate Catalyst," and "The Radiation of the Chinese Vegetable." The familiar writers of the early Gernsback days were Miles J. Breuer, M.D., Stanton A. Coblenz, Ray Cummings, David H. Keller, M.D., S.P. Meek, Ed Earl Repp, A. Hyatt Verrill and Harl Vincent. By the Campbell era, with Hugo Gernsback and old T. O'Connor Sloane no longer present to buy their work, these men were out of style. They appeared only in peripheral markets alongside writers like Pohl and Kornbluth, then wonder children yet to make a reputation. And one by one they ceased to write. The unfamiliarity of their work, and even their names, is some indication of how completely they have been superseded and forgotten. The reputations of those writers of the period who still survive—most notably, Jack Williamson, Murray Leinster, and Edmond Hamilton—depend on later work.

There is one striking exception to the general dullness and lack of importance of Gernsbackian scientifiction—the novel *The Skylark of Space* by Edward E. Smith, Ph.D., serialized in the August, September and October 1928 issues of *AMAZING*. Its impact at the time was tremendous. On the strength of one story—the only story by Smith that was ever published by Gernsback—Smith was acknowledged as the foremost sf writer of his time.

The Skylark of Space is the story of the discovery of a faster-than-light spaceship drive. It begins, conventionally enough, in a Washington, D.C., chem lab:

"Petrified with astonishment, Richard Seaton stared after the copper steam-bath upon which, a moment before, he had been electrolyzing his solution of 'X,' the unknown metal. As soon as he had removed the beaker with its precious contents the heavy bath had jumped endwise from under his hand as though it were

alive. It had flown with terrific speed over the table, smashing a dozen reagent-bottles on its way, and straight on out through the open window. Hastily setting the beaker down, he seized his binoculars and focused them upon the flying bath, which now, to the unaided vision, was merely a speck in the distance."

If the setting is conventional—and Seaton leaves the lab, hops onto his motorcycle and rides to his fiancée's home for dinner—the forthrightness with which this highly imaginative power is introduced is not. In a typical story of the time—"X, the Unknown, or The Incredible Ultimate Flying Bath"—this power would be all, and it would not allow itself to be tamed. In this story, however, the power is applied.

Seaton, together with Marty Crane, a young millionaire whom Seaton has met and won with a superior game of tennis, builds a starship. Fantastic! It is a stroke comparable to Wells's conception of the time machine. It opens the stars. But Wells's Time Traveler had to play alone. Seaton and Crane have company. They run a tight race with another chemist, Marc "Blackie" DuQuesne, who is building a ship of his own with the aid of the steel trust.

DuQuesne is described over and over in the *Skylark* books—of which there are four, the last, *Skylark DuQuesne*, published in 1965 shortly before Smith's death—as a darker twin of Seaton. He is totally unscrupulous, a cheerfully pragmatic villain, and the most winning character in the cast. The day after the *Skylark*, Seaton and Crane's spaceship, returns from its first after-dinner buzz around the Moon, DuQuesne kidnaps Dorothy, Seaton's fiancée, and begins the real adventure of the book:

"After Seaton had mounted his motorcycle, Dorothy turned toward a bench in

the shade of an old elm to watch a game of tennis on the court next door. Scarcely had she seated herself when a great copper-plated ball landed directly in front of her. A heavy steel door snapped open and a powerful figure clad in leather leaped out. The man's face and eyes were covered by his helmet flaps and amber goggles. . . . Picking her up lightly, DuQuesne carried her over the lawn to his spaceship. Dorothy screamed wildly as she found that her fiercest struggles made no impression on her captor."

Dorothy shoves DuQuesne against the control panel, the ship screams toward the stars, and Seaton and Crane give chase in the *Skylark*. By the time they catch up and effect a rescue—which involves a jolly scene in which the *Skylark* fires machine gun blasts in Morse code at DuQuesne's ship for lack of a more sophisticated method of communication—they are five thousand light years from home and in need of more X, the unknown metal.

Before returning home, they make three planetary stopovers. The last, longest and least interesting is pure local lost race politics. The second involves an encounter with a disembodied intelligence. The first is the best. They land on a ledge that most happily proves to be pure X. But that is not all: "At one end of the ledge rose a giant tree, wonderfully symmetrical, but of a peculiar form, its branches being longer at the top than at the bottom and having broad, dark-green leaves, long thorns, and odd, flexible, shoot-like tendrils."

While they are prospecting the ledge, they are suddenly attacked by a wild variety of creatures:

"The scene, so quiet a few moments before, was horribly changed. The air seemed filled with hideous monsters. Winged lizards of prodigious size hurtled through the air to crash against the *Sky-*

lark's armored hull. Flying monstrosities, with the fangs of tigers, attacked viciously. Dorothy screamed and started back as a scorpion-like thing ten feet in length leaped at the window in front of her, its terrible sting spraying the quartz with venom. As it fell to the ground a spider—if an eight-legged creature with spines instead of hair, faceted eyes, and a bloated globular body weighing hundreds of pounds may be called a spider—leaped upon it; and mighty mandibles against terrible sting, a furious battle raged. Twelve-foot cockroaches climbed nimbly across the fallen timber of the morass and began feeding voraciously on the carcass of the creature DuQuesne had killed. They were promptly driven away by another animal, a living nightmare of that reptilian age which apparently combined the nature and disposition of *tyrannosaurus rex* with a physical shape approximating that of the saber-tooth tiger. This newcomer towered fifteen feet high at the shoulders and had a mouth disproportionate even to his great size; a mouth armed with sharp fangs three feet in length. He had barely begun his meal, however, when he was challenged by another nightmare, a thing shaped more or less like a crocodile. . . .

"Suddenly the great tree bent over and lashed out against both animals. It transfixed them with its thorns, which the watchers now saw were both needle-pointed and barbed. It ripped at them with its long branches, which were in fact highly lethal spears. The broad leaves, equipped with sucking disks, wrapped themselves around the hopelessly impaled victims. The long, slender twigs or tendrils, each of which now had an eye at its extremity, waved about at a safe distance.

"After absorbing all of the two gladiators that was absorbable, the three re-

sumed its former position, motionless in all its strange, outlandish beauty.

"Dorothy licked her lips, which were almost as white as her face. 'I think I'm going to be sick,' she remarked, conversationally."

This is strange, meaningful stuff to come boiling up out of nowhere. Without stopping to try to discover the nature of this multiplicity of hostile creatures and that queer guardian tree, we can say that we know for certain where we are now. This is the World Beyond the Hill beyond any doubt, and this new universe of stars, planets and great reaches of space that has been entered by the *Skylark* is a transcendent realm.

The Skylark of Space is a remarkable book. Its particular virtues are considerable. As a primarily imaginative and aesthetic story, it does not depend on the realistic background of its early chapters, and it has not dated with so much Gernsbackian sf. Moreover, even though it is naive, it has a freshness and vitality that keep it readable. It has an easy, homey, comfortable charm. It is of the essence of its spirit that Richard Seaton rides a motorcycle and hacks around the universe in a Hawaiian sport shirt and tennis shoes. And it is also of its essence that when Seaton and Crane return from tooting around their backyard universe in the spaceship they have built in the basement, the lights are on for them and someone is waiting up.

Beyond its individual virtues, however, *The Skylark of Space* had untold influence on the development of speculative fantasy. At a time when fiction hardly dared stray to the next planet, it made the stars a playground.

What is most wonderful is that *The Skylark of Space* was not written in 1928. It was begun in 1915, while Smith was a graduate student in chemistry. He was given a hand with the love interest, which

he did not feel competent to handle himself, by Lee Hawkins Garby, the wife of a friend. The novel was set aside in 1916, then picked up again by Smith alone in 1919 and finished in 1920. And no one would publish it then. No one would publish it until Gernsback, who—heaven be thanked—did not realize how subversive of his ideals it was.

Smith's greatest limitation was his reliance on the series story. Starting imaginatively with "X," he must top it in each succeeding story. When he had exhausted (at least for thirty years) the *Skylark* universe in 1934 with *Skylark of Valeron*, the third book in the series, he began again with a new series, the *Lensman* books, cut from larger cloth. They traded the comfortable charm of the *Skylark* series for breadth of conception. Galaxies are pitted against galaxies. Evil alien race is discovered behind evil alien race. And superior men, the wearers of the Lens, are aided in the fight by good fatherly aliens. But again the need to top one imaginative power with a larger imaginative power, and one grandiosity with a larger grandiosity, meant eventual audience weariness. By the time the last book of the series, *Children of the Lens*, was serialized in *Astounding* in 1947-48, the white heat of anticipation that attended the publication of *Galactic Patrol* and *Gray Lensman*, the early books of the series, was gone. In speculative fantasy, more is not necessarily better.

Important as it was, *The Skylark of Space* did not stand entirely alone. Coincident with its serialization in *AMAZING*, there appeared an interstellar epic, *Crashing Suns* by Edmond Hamilton, serialized in the August and September 1928 issues of *Weird Tales*. Hamilton has had a long active career, extending to the present, which has included some good original work. Too much of his writing, however, has been crude escapism, most

particularly the series of Captain Future space opera novels that he ground out during the Forties. *Crashing Suns* was cruder than *The Skylark of Space* and appeared in a magazine devoted to an older sort of fantasy. It did not have the same impact on the development of modern sf, and though recently reprinted in paperback, it remains a forgotten work.

Early Gernsbackian scientifiiction was stiffly didactic, and its supporting symbols—its characters and paraphernalia and backgrounds surrounding the transcendent center—were realistic. The publication of *The Skylark of Space* (and *Crashing Suns*) can be seen as marking the beginning of a transition to the imaginative and the aesthetic that dominated speculative fantasy from 1928 through 1935, at first only in longer fiction, but eventually in stories at all lengths.

The Skylark of Space was important to the trend. Sam Moskowitz credits its publication as the inspiration that set John Campbell, then an eighteen-year-old just entering MIT, to writing sf. When Campbell's work began appearing in the early Thirties, he assumed a position of importance second only to Smith. But we suspect that he would have begun writing even without *The Skylark of Space*. The change, of which Campbell was such an important part, would have occurred in any case. In the same August 1928 issue of *AMAZING* as the first installment of *The Skylark of Space*, for instance, there appeared an imaginative novelet, "Armageddon—2419 A.D.," by Phil Nowlan, the first of two stories about Anthony "Buck" Rogers.

The trend was not exclusive to sf. The popular arts of the Twenties were heavily didactic and domestic. At the end of the decade, they became generally more aesthetic and imaginative. The Depression may have added fuel to the change, but it had begun even before the Stock Mar-

ket Crash. The ratiocinative amateur detective like Ellery Queen and Philo Vance, who solves intellectual puzzles too intricate for the police, gave way to the professional private eye like Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe, who was more intimately involved with crime. Buck Rogers and Tarzan moved into the comic strips, replacing in popularity the family chronicles like *Gasoline Alley* that had dominated the Twenties. Historical novels like *Anthony Adverse* and *Gone With the Wind* became the dominant popular fiction of the Thirties. And imaginative pulp magazines like *Doc Savage*, *The Shadow*, and *Astounding Stories of Super-Science* began to be issued.

As we can see, then, both the publication of *The Skylark of Space* and the advent of *Astounding*, a pulp magazine different in kind from the more staid *AMAZING* and *Science Wonder*, in January 1930 occurred in a context which they reinforced. Both aided in the necessary destruction of the over-strait Gernsback mold. Speculative fantasy cannot be completely imaginative without becoming fuzzy-minded and disconnected—if you like, escapist—but speculative fantasy at its purest is heavily imaginative, and the change in emphasis gave sf a liveliness and emotional power that it had previously lacked.

In the early Thirties, three important new clusters of imaginative supporting symbols were developed. The earliest, the alien exploration complex, was chiefly pioneered by Smith and Campbell in *AMAZING* and *AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY*. The other two clusters were the space opera complex, which was largely accumulated by Harry Bates and Desmond Hall, the editors of the Clayton *Astounding*, writing in *Astounding* under the pseudonym Anthony Gilmore, and the sword and sorcery complex, developed by Robert E. Howard and Clark

Ashton Smith in *Weird Tales*.

The alien exploration complex takes a character or a set of characters from a realistic context, and through election or accident plunges them into an unknown world where they meet transcendence. The strange locale can be inside the Earth or the Moon, as it was so often in the nineteenth century. It can be at the beginning or the end of time, as in *The Time Machine*. It can be vast reaches of space, as in *The Skylark of Space*, or it can be a single planet. It can be an alternate universe, or a universe larger or smaller than our own. The method of transition can be the invention of a time machine or space ship, astral projection, kidnapping by aliens, a drug scientific or Oriental, an exploratory expedition or an unlucky encounter with a meteor.

This complex is early. It needs a home base and emptiness. Its great advantage is that it permits an encounter with any kind of transcendent symbol—a power, an alien, or a realm. But its very emptiness is a disadvantage. Characters must necessarily import their motivations with them. As with *Skylark*, they must bring their Blackie DuQuesnes along when they land on a strange world. And when the emptiness is filled with concreteness, it cannot be employed again. The complex uses itself up.

By the time that Smith began to write, the Moon was no longer a plausible location for alien exploration. It was too familiar. Smith reopened the complex on a vast scale. But the vast scale lasted only until the vastnesses were filled. By the end of *Skylark Three*, the second story in the series, serialized in *AMAZING* in 1930, Smith had circumscribed the territory. Seaton and Crane & Co. pass out of our own galaxy and look back to see it as "indistinguishable from numberless other tiny, dim patches of light. It was as small, as insignificant, as remote, as any

other nebula!" And they scare themselves "pea-green" and "purple" with their audacity.

In his next novel, *Spacehounds of IPC*, Smith stayed within the confines of the Solar System, and disappointed readers who wanted just a bit more of the galaxy explored. They had to look to John Campbell to do that, most particularly in the series of novels starring Arcot, Wade and Morey: *The Black Star Passes*, *Islands of Space* and *Invaders from the Infinite*, first published in *AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY* in 1930, 1931 and 1932. Smith returned with another novel of alien exploration in 1934, *Skylark of Valeron* in the F. Orlin Tremaine-edited *Astounding*, but now the areas explored were another galaxy and the fourth dimension.

In these stories, Smith and Campbell filled the galaxy with alien races, friendly and unfriendly, and with larger and larger powers. They vied in space battles, and when they were done, the galaxy as a whole was a wilderness no longer, but a frontier.

Popular as he was, Campbell was the much less interesting writer. He lacked Smith's charm. His style was a graceless, agrammatical belch of imaginary science. His strength was in the number of imaginary zeroes he could conjure up to stand behind his powers: "What use is there to attempt description of that scene as 2,500,000,000,000,000,000,000 tons of rock and metal and matter crashed against a wall of energy, immovable and inconceivable. The planets crumpled, and split wide. A thousand pieces, and suddenly there was a further mistiness about it, and the whole enormous mass, seeming but a toy, as it was from this distance in space, and as it was in this ship, was enclosed in that same, immovable, unalterable wall of energy."

This is from *Invaders from the Infinite*,

perhaps the ultimate example of pure stupendous power used to impress good aliens and dominate bad to the greater glory of the human race. For all its faults, however, *Invaders from the Infinite* was an important and necessary step into the imaginative and aesthetic. Gernsback provided the opportunity for speculative fantasy to gather and concentrate its strength, but his conception of sf was constricting. Even today, *Invaders from the Infinite* has a freshness and energy missing in a Gernsbackian novel like Dr. David H. Keller's *The Human Termites*, serialized in *Science Wonder Stories* in 1929. It was no accident that *Wonder Stories* added the least to the development of sf in the early Thirties.

In the wake of Smith and Campbell, there came many writers employing the alien exploration complex on a smaller scale, and in stories of shorter length. After *Invaders from the Infinite* and *Sky-lark of Valeron*, stories of the type necessarily had to be framed on a smaller scale.

In the wake of Seaton and Crane, and Arcot, Wade and Morey, there came a different cluster of symbols, the space opera complex, appropriate to a frontier. The elements of space opera were lifted from every sort of adventure fiction—Spanish Main, Western, Oriental soldier-of-fortune, South Sea beachcomber, French Foreign Legion, and California and Alaskan Gold Rush—and used to fill in the map behind the explorers. There were Space Patrolmen, miners, colonists, pirates, rough frontier towns built beside exotic dying cities, smuggling of every commodity imaginable, planet-to-planet races to carry serum or to win a mail contract or to keep a dastard from winning a trophy he doesn't deserve, colonial rebellions and space battles. Although in the Forties and Fifties, this complex was carried out into the galaxy, in the Thirties and in boys' books into the Fifties, the

location was generally restricted to our Solar System.

Space opera has immediate plausibility. Characters have reasons for being where they are and for doing a wide variety of interesting things—whereas in the alien exploration story they are much more highly restricted. Human interaction is possible, and so is the presentation of men and women of more than ordinary human size: heroes and villains. And, again unlike the alien exploration story, locales are not immediately used up, but may be employed again and again to good effect. Even today, space opera elements may turn up in respectable and ambitious sf stories.

But space opera is more limited than alien exploration in the transcendent symbols it permits. It does not have the same wide-open freedom to produce endless wonders from any quarter at any moment. The awe generated by the alien exploration complex was the secret of the much-vaunted "sense of wonder" which is supposed to have existed—and truly did exist—in the sf of the early Thirties.

Transcendent realms in the territories ruled by space opera are almost as tightly circumscribed as on contemporary Earth. Between the colonies, the spaceports, the rhinestone mines, the muck farms, and the pirate lairs, there is room for transcendent realms only in secret caverns tucked away beneath the ancient sands of Mars.

Aliens in space opera may be transcendent, but if they are, they are almost certainly visitors from elsewhere. The visible extraterrestrials of space opera are colorful mundanities, transpositions of Arabs, or Chinese, or American Indians, who serve the same story functions. They are beautiful winged Martian princesses, or Venusian stoop-laborers broken by contact with brutal Terrans. The princesses are called "Beautiful." The stoop-

laborers are called "Charlie."

The transcendent symbols in space opera are almost always merely powers, given extra emphasis by the exotic locale. The possible meanings of space opera are therefore limited.

At its best, as in the first half-dozen juveniles (*Space Cadet*, *Farmer in the Sky*, *The Rolling Stones*, etc.) that Robert Heinlein wrote for Scribners after World War II, space opera can be very solid respectable stuff, but even at its best, space opera does not have the pure heart-stopping impact of the best speculative fantasy. At its worst, it falls into cliché melodramatics with only the faintest whispering touch of transcendence. Space opera at its worst is as bad as speculative fantasy can get.

Space opera elements had begun to exist in sf by 1930, but some sort of credit for assembling the complex can be assigned to Harry Bates and his assistant, Desmond Hall. Bates says, "From the beginning I had been bothered by the seeming inability of my writers to mix convincing characters with our not-too-convincing science; so after nearly two years, with the double hope of furnishing the writers an example of a vivid hero and villain and my readers a whopping hero versus villain, I generated the first Hawk Carse story, I creating the characters and plot and Hall as usual writing the basic draft. I still remember Clayton's reaction. Almost at once after departing with it (it seemed) he was back with it in my office, a huge encircled Yes! on the envelope. I had never seen him so openly pleased. He commanded me to get more of the same."

The Hawk Carse novelets, published in *Astounding* between November 1931 and November 1932, were fresh, vigorous, professional pulp trash. Here are the opening lines of the first story: "Hawk Carse came to the frontiers of space when

Saturn was the frontier planet, which was years before the swift Patrol ships brought Earth's law and order to those vast regions. A casual glance at his slender figure made it seem impossible that he was to rise to be the greatest adventurer in space, that his name was to carry such deadly connotation in later years. But on closer inspection, a number of little things became evident: the steadiness of his light gray eyes; the marvelous strong-fingered hands; the wiry build of his splendidly proportioned body. Summing these things up and adding the brilliant resourcefulness of the man, the complete ignorance of fear, one could perhaps understand why even his blood enemy, the impassive Ku Sui, a man otherwise devoid of every human trait, could not face Carse unmoved in his moments of cold fury." It may be enough to say that the Hawk Carse stories were neither the best nor the worst space opera ever written.

As the Thirties wore on, stories of alien exploration were more and more replaced by space opera. In early John Campbell stories like *Invaders from the Infinite*, space opera elements are imported for color. In the very first Arcot, Wade and Morey story, a novelet entitled "Piracy Preferred" (*AMAZING*, June 1930) which takes place entirely in the Solar System, Wade is a super-criminal with a sense of humor who is defeated by Arcot and Morey and allowed to join their club. In later John Campbell stories of the Thirties, written when the alien exploration vein had begun to wear thin, like the Penton and Blake series he wrote for *Thrilling Wonder Stories* after Gernsback had sold his magazine to a pulp publisher, space opera elements dominate—as they also do in Smith's Lensman series.

The third new symbol complex, the sword and sorcery story, does not stand in the same main line of development

of modern speculative fantasy as do alien exploration and space opera. Sword and sorcery—sometimes called heroic fantasy—is more closely tied to the symbols of the old speculative fantasy. Its transcendent powers are magic. Its transcendent aliens are demons and eldritch monsters. In terms of modern genres, sword and sorcery stories are weird fiction rather than science fiction, and they emphasize sex, sadism, and the occult, all of which are generally foreign to modern sf. We mention sword and sorcery because it shares some ancestors with modern sf, and because it has both been influenced by modern sf and influenced it in turn.

The ancestors of sword and sorcery include the eighteenth century gothic horror story, Edgar Allen Poe, the Arabian Nights-flavored Oriental romance, Lord Dunsany, and the lost race story. Sword and sorcery is the lostrace complex removed from the narrow valleys and constricted caverns of the present and given full freedom to be itself without modern intrusion in a barbaric Atlantean past. This Atlantis is not the Atlantis of Plato or even of Ignatius Donnelly, but an Atlantis-beyond-Atlantis. Instead of being visited from the outside by one of us moderns, the sword and sorcery world is experienced from within, usually by an adventurer with an insatiable taste for battle and an antipathy to black magic.

The two inventors and early masters of the sword and sorcery story were Robert E. Howard and Clark Ashton Smith. Smith was a stylist who wrote subtle, tortuous, over-ripe stories of decadent races and their awful deities. He built worlds—secondary universes—rather than concentrating on the adventures of a single character as has been the usual practice in sword and sorcery. His first story in this vein, "The Tale of Satampra Zeiros," appeared in the November 1931

issue of *Weird Tales*. Smith wrote a prodigious number of sword and sorcery stories until 1936, and then all but ceased to write. His chief influence has been in style and mood. Jack Vance's *The Dying Earth* is quite clearly influenced by Smith.

Howard was a very different type of writer. He was a pulp hack who poured out a stream of Westerns, sport stories, detective fiction, stories of the occult, and a wide variety of historical and contemporary adventure fiction. He was no stylist at all. He was a yarn-spinner, a storyteller, and his work had a simple vigorous forthrightness, not unrelated to that of the Hawk Carse stories. Howard, much more than Smith, fixed the pattern of the sword and sorcery story. In 1929, he published two stories in *Weird Tales* about King Kull, an exile from Atlantis who rises to rule a barbarian kingdom. Then, between 1932 and his suicide in 1936, Howard wrote his most successful stories, a long series about a character named Conan, a sullen, simple-sly, over-muscled barbarian who is variously a thief, a pirate, a soldier, a general, and a king, plus what-you-will, in the many-kingdomed world that followed the destruction of Atlantis by some eight thousand years.

In its early years, sword and sorcery was freshened by influences from science fiction. Clark Ashton Smith set one cycle of stories in Zothique, Earth's last continent in the far future. In Howard's "The Tower of the Elephant," the monster Conan faces proves to be a stranded extraterrestrial, blinded and tortured, that Conan kills out of pity. And, starting with her first story, "Shambleau," in the November 1933 *Weird Tales*, C. L. Moore wrote a series of stories about Northwest Smith, a space opera hero who encounters sword and sorcery situations on Venus and Mars.

However, after 1936, when Howard

died, Smith retired, and Moore turned to modern sf, sword and sorcery became a frozen form, a ritual dance after Howard. Early Moore and Smith continue to have influence on sf, but the sword and sorcery complex itself is a living fossil with no apparent ability to evolve.

The general change in emphasis from realistic Gernsbackian scientifiction to imaginative sf was confirmed by the practice of F. Orlin Tremaine when he became editor of *Astounding* in October 1933. Tremaine also edited other pulp titles like *Cowboy Stories* and *Bill Barnes, Air Adventurer* for Street and Smith, but he cared more deeply about *Astounding* and it showed in the magazine. The authors that Tremaine published were not new. They were the same men who had been writing for *AMAZING*, *Wonder Stories* and the Clayton *Astounding*. But Tremaine allowed them a freedom they had not previously had, and the result in 1934 and 1935 was what has been called the first Golden Age of *Astounding*. It does not compare with the later Golden Age of the Campbell *Astounding*, which had a broader base and a longer life-span. This first towering glory was built almost entirely on the narrow foundation of the alien exploration story, and therefore was doomed to a short height and a fast fall. But it was a brief period more exciting than any science fiction had previously produced, and it made an impact on sf readers that is still nursed and remembered nearly forty years later.

Beginning in the December 1933 issue of *Astounding*, Tremaine instituted a policy of publishing what he termed "thought variant" stories. In practice, thought variants seem to have been chiefly either new locales for alien realms, or new means of reaching these realms. For example, the second thought variant story published, Donald Wandrei's "Colossus" in the January 1934 issue, is about

a man who expands into a larger universe in which ours is but an atom. This was a new variation on all the stories like "The Diamond Lens" or "The Girl in the Golden Atom" in which a man shrinks and finds a smaller universe within an atom. Murray Leinster's "Sidewise in Time" in the June issue was the first parallel universe story. E. E. Smith's *The Skylark of Valeron* and John Campbell's *The Mightiest Machine* were also labeled thought variant stories.

These stories introduced a multiplicity of transcendent realms, while others, without the thought variant label, set foot in realms present by implication in the stories of others, like all the worlds glimpsed by *Skylark III* from outside our galaxy. Past and future time, distant planets, other dimensions of all sorts. Most of these realms are not reached by anything as linear and deliberate as a space ship setting out for a specific destination. Rather they are reached by astral projection, or by warps in the fabric of space, by racial memory or by matter transmitters. There is almost a deliberate avoidance of concreteness, the better to retain mystery. Realms are protected by the non-repeatability of the means of travel to them.

Tremain's practice was never spelled out as clearly as it appears in retrospect, but the simple tagging of these stories as special and desirable necessarily led to emulation. What might be fairest to say is that Tremaine wanted and encouraged imaginative work. Alien exploration was the most fruitful—and emotionally powerful—way to be imaginative in 1934. Tremaine recognized the virtue of the work he was offered, and by publishing it, encouraged still more of the same. Thus this mini-Golden Age.

Tremaine's policy was particularly congenial to a writer like Jack Williamson, whose natural bent was for strongly

emotional stories, often with a mystical conclusion. Williamson's first story, the Merritt-ish "The Metal Man," was published by Gernsback in 1928. His later work has been smoother and better written. What is probably his best novel, *The Humanoids*, was published much later, in 1948. And Williamson continues to write today, with a serial novel published in *Galaxy* in 1971. But Williamson's moment of greatest influence was during the Tremaine Golden Age when he published the most popular novel of the Thirties, *The Legion of Space*, and novelets like "The Galactic Circle," in which a ship takes off for the ends of the universe, expands into a macro-universe, emerges from an atom in a flower, and lands in time for the passengers to see their same ship taking off and passing out of sight.

The tone of story titles in the Tremaine *Astounding* was distinctly different from the tone of Gernsbackian titles, reflecting the change in content. Stories were now called "Bright Illusion," "Alas, All Thinking!", "The Lotus Eaters," and "Proxima Centauri." And one-word titles, typical of modern sf, and indicative of its tendency to pose the universal and subjective case rather than the particular and objective, began to appear: *Rebirth*, "Twilight," "Blindness," "Age," "Energy," and "Entropy."

The change in these two good years was primarily in novels and in novelets, and much less in short stories, which continued in the old Gernsbackian (and Wellsian) mode of realistic stories of invention and catastrophe. The leading edge of modern sf has always been its longer stories, its novels and novelets, with short stories lagging behind, reflecting change and filling in corners. Sf short stories began to become more imaginative by 1936 at a time when novels and novelets were becoming comparatively realistic.

The change in the Tremaine *Astounding* was a change in content, not in style. Writing quality remained generally poor, as crude and clumsy as it ever was under Gernsback. What changed was the emotional power of stories—their ability to move readers—and some still retain enough of that power in spite of their clumsiness to remain readable today.

The only new writer of consequence to appear during this period—and its brief, bright star—was Stanley G. Weinbaum. His first and most famous story, "A Martian Odyssey," appeared in *Wonder Stories* in July 1934, and was soon acknowledged by Charles Hornig, the editor of *Wonder Stories*, as the most popular story the magazine had ever published. Its primacy is evident in its title—like *2001: A Space Odyssey*, it was a first work in a new vein.

"A Martian Odyssey" illustrates our point about style. It is an account of a trek across Mars, told in retrospect to his fellows by one member of the first human expedition to the planet. It is broken by frequent interjections from the audience. At this distance, it seems patently clumsy. But the clumsiness wasn't noticed by readers when it was first published. They noticed the brilliant characterization. (In fact, it was not brilliant. It was barely present. But characterization of any kind, particularly in short fiction, was rare to nonexistent.) They grooved on the brisk, breezy dialog. (To a modern ear, it is slang and corn, corn and slang, but by the wooden standard of the time, Weinbaum had a refreshingly deft and delicate touch.) Best of all, Weinbaum's Mars was a transcendent realm brought almost next door, featuring a flock of intriguing and original aliens. There are parthenogenetic barrel beasts, black tentacled creatures that project hypnotic dreams, and a silicon beast that shits bricks with which it builds ten-foot tall pyramids. And best,

there is a friendly and intelligent "ostrich" named Tweel who is much given to leaping in the air and slamming down into the sand on his beak. It is his method of locomotion. These aliens are still effective. Without a doubt, they are unusual.

Historically, "A Martian Odyssey" is extremely important. It was innovative in both style and content. But its stylistic innovations have now been bettered by the common average of modern sf, and the story succeeds or fails for us on its content alone.

In the year and a half following the publication of "A Martian Odyssey," Weinbaum had eleven stories published, four in *Wonder Stories* and seven in *Astounding*, all short stories or novelets. Four, three of them in *Wonder*, were conventional invention/disaster stories in the traditional Wells-Gernsback mode, but six, five in *Astounding*, were alien exploration stories in the style of "A Martian Odyssey." These are the basis of Weinbaum's reputation. All are similar: an expedition or a forced trek across one of the planets or moons of our Solar System which then proves to be an alien realm defined in terms of a clutch of strange plants and animals; invisible plots; breezy style. Weinbaum's greatest

strength was his ability to concretize his aliens. He filled his realms with creatures that seemed at home. He so clearly marked a territory as his own that breezy stories with funny aliens were automatically marked as Weinbaumesque.

But then, almost before he had started, Stanley Weinbaum died in December 1935, at the age of 35, of cancer. And the brief, bright period was done.

Weinbaum, in all his brilliance, was a harbinger. His breezy style was no accident. It was a sign of the replacement of awe by familiarity. The realms of which he wrote were not the great galloping areas available to Smith and Campbell. They were small and local: Mars and Venus. And that Weinbaum could write of them in as short a length as he did is one further sign that the alien exploration complex had become a commonplace, sketchable in shorthand. Nearly the last story of Weinbaum's to be published in his lifetime was a novelet entitled "The Red Peri" (*Astounding*, November 1935). It was a space opera about a girl pirate on Pluto, and it was to be the first of a series. If even Weinbaum was turning to space opera, the times were definitely changing.

—ALEXEI & CORY PANSIN

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fantasy books

—reviewed by Fritz Leiber—



I WILL FEAR NO EVIL, by Robert A. Heinlein, Berkley, \$1.25, 512 pp.

Heinlein is my most beloved science-fiction writer, and by the supreme test: by a long stretch I reread his books more often than those of any other author in the field. When bedtime comes and I feel in the mood for sf (I don't always; sometimes I grab a book by Conan Doyle, Ian Fleming, John D. MacDonald, Nigel Balchin, Eric Ambler, C. S. Forester, Robert E. Howard, H. P. Lovecraft, or one of Talbot Mundy's Tros books, or *The Worm Ouroboros*), my eyes may drift toward the primal explorations of Wells and Stapledon, the color-blazing multilevel canvases of Chip Delaney, the incredibly bright travels through the mind of youthful genius by Ted Sturgeon, Ward Moore's wonderfully real and vastly neglected *Bring the Jubilee*, Robert Graves' magical *Watch the Northwind Rise*, Orwell's *1984*, mad *Catscradle* by Vonnegut, *The 25th Hour*, or any of a dozen equals, but three times out of four my fingers close on a Heinlein. It may be one of his best (here, for me, *Double Star*, *Spaceman Jones*, and *Time for the Stars* alternate for the lead—further, deponent sayeth not) or one toward the foot of my semi-private list, where we come perilously close to *Stranger in a Strange Land*, but that doesn't matter—it's a Heinlein.

Why? Am I regressing toward childhood? Have I always had a sneaking weakness for rousing adventure stories in which an honest, industrious, courageous, youthful-spirited hero wins out in the end? Am I seeking a father figure? Do I lack some higher sort of taste and seriousness?

Now this is, honest to God, a most extremely, even frighteningly odd question, for my own writing is almost at an opposite pole from Heinlein's. My *The Wanderer* perhaps edges nearest to his stuff, but even that's no close approach.

For instance (always trying to judge from his works and never from any impression of the man himself) Heinlein has an undying faith in paddling, birching, belting, and lashing as the best means of instilling politeness, education, and high morality, while I am a pat on the head, honest talk, at most deprivation of privileges man. (Hereafter, I won't make statements about my own positions; they're usually obvious, always embarrassing, and take up too much space.) This persistent notion of Heinlein's comes out most strongly in *Starship Troopers*, but even the hero of *Farnham's Freehold* believes he learns his black master's language faster, at least at first, because he is painfully "tingled" for the smallest mistake.

With like proviso, Heinlein believes the Malthusian Law infallible. Hence attempts at birth control are futile, and even if they did work they would be bad for

us, because Heinlein also believes man to be the deadliest known animal in the universe and that if he doesn't work hard to maintain this reputation—including swiftly populating the Galaxy wherever possible—he will be wiped out by some deadlier breed. Though I must admit that he seems to recognize alternate courses, such as the Martian Way. But just you wait.

Heinlein believes (I'm always and only trying to judge from his books, keep in mind) the master-servant relationship forever workable and proper. This is joined by a somewhat shaded belief in equality of opportunity for all, regardless of color, religion, species, and even sex: Podkayne's ma was a hairy-eared engineer when she wasn't bemusedly nursing her babies, Rod's sister is an assault captain in the Amazons, and there was the inventor of the space drive used in *Stranger*.

But women of this sort never have big parts in Heinlein books. He specializes in snobbish neurotic wives who put down their men, incredibly evil old women, quietly good mothers, and pretty young women wholesome as rosy apples without a worm (these last sometimes show initiative, but only in rare spurts). His best are teenagers such as the scientist's daughter in *Have Spacesuit, Will Travel*, Podkayne, Betty Sorenson of *The Star Beast*, and the charming "Portrait of Jenny" girl in *Doorway into Summer*. My guess is Heinlein waited too long to start writing about love and sex.

About religious and spiritual matters he writes as crazily as most of us think, judging from me. He does *not* believe in God (I refuse to take seriously those comic fundamentalist deities in *Stranger* and the charming novelette "Elsewhen"), but he *does* believe in the Other World and passionately in personal immortality. Recall Lazarus Long of *Methuselah's*

Children, well on his way toward living forever. Or, to quote from Martin Gardner's *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*, 1957 Dover edition, p. 316, "Robert Heinlein, writing in *AMAZING STORIES*, April, 1956, predicted that before the year 2001 the survival of the soul after death would be demonstrated with 'scientific rigor' by following the path broken by Bernstein"—mastermind and co-author of *The Search for Bridey Murphy*. As for the Other World, coexistent with our own, we glimpse it first, I believe, in *Beyond This Horizon*; a Pennsylvania hex-doctor teaches Waldo how to use it to conquer his myasthenia gravis; and the Martians live by it, judging from *Red Planet* and *Stranger*: their adults do not die, but become "ghosts," living a communal life of their own and able to advise and occasionally appear as apparitions to younger Martians and even to some Earthlings; they are immortals. Also, Valentine Smith uses it in *Stranger* to create on Earth a religion which is a mixture of Martian wisdom and Earthly sexual love. The result is a hippie-like cult of "water brotherhood" and free love, which was eagerly seized upon by many young and some older readers, the majority of whom were probably otherwise uninterested in sf. I sometimes wonder what the author thought about this consequence.

But although Valentine Smith becomes a willing martyr to his cult, rather like Stapledon's Odd John, the Martian-wisdom part of it is firmly based on the ability of mature Martians (including Valentine Smith) to "grok" wrongness or evil in objects or living beings and wipe them out of existence by an exertion of psychic power. Valentine Smith is capable of free and almost universal love because he is first able to destroy evil at will. To me this makes the Martians among the deadliest, if not the deadliest

beings known and no exception at all to the universal rule of survival of the fittest. So much for the Martian Way.

This seems to me a good point at which to tackle *I Will Fear No Evil*, since it is much concerned with death and immortality and the power of two or more minds to live in one body, and even perhaps hints at reincarnation.

Evil is perhaps the least successful of what I call Heinlein's "marred master-works" (yet what master-work is not marred?), the others being *Stranger*, *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* (which suffers from too little staged action, too much covered in a running resumé by the narrator, though just how Heinlein could have managed otherwise I cannot suggest), and *Beyond This Horizon*, which to my recollection has too much conversation and no villains of consequence. I call these master-works because the author appears to be saying many serious things in them—and simply because they are all quite long.

Like *Beyond This Horizon*, *Evil* has no real villains, no serious conflicts, and no reverses of fortune (though some surprising pieces of good fortune) except perhaps at the very end. Some of the setting is slighted: we get nary a glimpse of the muggers and compulsive killer types who rove the unpoliced, urban Abandoned Areas in droves, or even any of the other A.A.-types, with the exception of a noble, fringe-genius, hippie painter allergic to money and content to live on tacos and pizza.

In this horrid urban culture those who are both prudent and very wealthy live in forts disguised as mansions and employ guards recruited chiefly from ex-cons and ex-fuzz who lost their jobs by being too brutal. How their millionaire-plus masters keep their undying loyalty by high pay, pampering, and unerring judgment of character, is a matter to make Machievelli

and Cesar Borgia shake their heads. (Or would it have been?)

There isn't even much conflict in the inner space of the story. The two conjoined souls of the near-centennarian billionaire and his beautiful secretary are in love and almost perfect concord from the start. She remains the yes-girl, cheers his least insight, and on the rare occasions when their opinions differ, is generally wrong. Women's Lib should fume.

Inevitably the novel exemplifies the saying, "If youth knew, if age could," but a little violent inner bickering and some real victories for the girl would have provided some excitement and tension.

Wisely, Heinlein has his soul-mates unable to do anything but "silently" talk to each other or be silent, a variation on this limitation of the device he used effectively in *Time for the Stars*.

Incidentally, most of the inner conversation is about sex, with the girl's randy, all-variations experiences almost always topped by those of the Boss (yes, even inside him, she calls him that). The usual conclusion is that all fun-sex is good, good, good!—which doesn't strike me as going very deep.

And—a minor point—I was sometimes bored by the long master-guard conversations and I wasn't titillated by the chatter of girls putting on lengthily-described semi-transparent clothing and skin paint.

Yet despite its lacks, *Evil* has quite a lot of the Heinlein vigor, inventiveness, jolly spite, basic optimism, deep reverence for all books and knowledge pursued for its own sake, and the will to understand and evaluate on to the last the world as it changes—rather than write imitations of himself, or custard-headed (he'd call them that, I think) dreams of world utopia, or horrible visions of doom.

I myself happen to write quite a few of those last two sorts of stories (especially the last) and quite a few tales in which

pacifism ultimately conquers force, and here I find another reason for my addiction to Heinlein. I tend to use him as a sort of anti-Leiber, to check that I'm not getting too far away from common sense, optimism, and the courageous facing of the greatest dangers. Incidentally, I believe that Heinlein plain just doesn't like to write gloomy or doomful stories; one definite clue to this is that in his famous chart, *Future History, 1951-2600 A.D.*, three of the six stories labeled "Stories to be Told" are "The Sound of his Wings," "Eclipse," and "The Stone Pillow," somewhat gloomy-sounding titles and all apparently set in the theocratic tyranny established by Nehemiah Scudder and his followers, a period when sanity and real science had to go underground; all three remain untold.

Speaking of the famous chart, it's a good thing Heinlein didn't follow it strictly, or hesitate to break with it when inspiration dictated otherwise. Though here one must watch out. Some seeming breaks with the chart may be illusory. For instance, during the 70 or so years of the voyage of the *Elsie* in *Time for the Stars*, Earth starts out using torchships and ends with ships operating on the principle of simultaneity which can go apparently anywhere in the Galaxy, at least, in no time. Then what about the ships of *Starman Jones*, which traveled by dog-leg from one difficulty navigated congruity in space to another? Why, for one thing, such ships may have had their entire chief career during those 70 years; the electric interurban trolley car (perhaps unfortunately, as some conservationists think now) had an even shorter career.

One good thing about the chart certainly: it likely helped Heinlein keep his stories linked to Earth and, because of cultural lag in various areas, linked to the world of today, something adding to

the basic realism and charm of his stories, and a characteristic Heinleinism.

No writer can be pinned down completely and so exceptions can be searched out to all the generalizations, however guarded, I've made about Heinlein's stories. He has written stories of doom, best perhaps the novella "The Year of the Jackpot." While in *Doorway Into Summer* there is a beautiful young woman who turns out to be a complete bitch and villainess. He has constructed numerous non-solar planets, as in *Methuselah's Children*, though Earthmen tread them and usually part of the setting is on Earth. And so on.

What a writing career the man has had thus far! First what I think of as the Bombshell Stories, which burst like such in *Astounding* in 1939, I think, beginning with "Lifeline" and carrying on through Scudder's dictatorship and the genetics controversies to the period of "Coventry" and the Covenant. Then, after his war work, the sleek shorts which made *The Saturday Evening Post* several times. Then the so-called juveniles, which save for certain small limitations, are altogether anything but such. And then more books for adults, though I'm sure as many youngsters read them as read the "juveniles."

Long may he write!

NEW WORLDS FOR OLD, Ed. by Lin Carter, Ballantine, \$1.25, 326 pp.

To the already many Adult Fantasy books Lin Carter has edited for Ballantine, he now adds one of the greatest variety: shorts and novelettes by writers ranging from William Beckford and Poe to C. L. Moore and Carter himself, and even three gargantuan fantasy poems—an excellent innovation in anthologies of this sort (though Judith Merrill had earlier begun introducing poetry into her anthologies of science fiction).

As interesting in their way are Carter's introduction to the book and his often long notes prefacing the stories themselves. The notes present many fascinating facts, such as that Clark Ashton Smith, author of "The Hashish-Eater," one of the poems included, and also translator (from the French in which the eccentric Englishman William Beckford chose to write it) of the book's first tale, "The Story of the Princess Zulkais and the Prince Kalilah," also had as mentor and friend George Sterling, whose flamingly colorful, "A Wine of Wizardry," is another of the included poems. Or that Mervyn Peake's third and short Gormenghast novel, *Titus Alone*, was hurried to its conclusion while its author was suffering from a viral brain disease; one of the sections excluded from *Titus Alone* appears here as a self-complete short story, "The Party at Lady Cusp-Canine's."

The notes also contain a few of the editor's opinions, some of which are quite startling. While it is nice to be reminded by "Silence: A Fable" that the range of Poe's talent included pure fantasy, it is surprising at the very least to be informed that Poe "penned the most rapid and meaningless doggerel extant outside of the purple pages of Swinburne," especially when the editor goes on to include as "one of the loveliest and most exotic and melodious" fantasy poems known to him Oscar Wilde's heavily empurpled "The Sphinx;" it comes as a relief when Carter tells us that Wilde was barely twenty when he wrote it.

I also have a bone to pick with the editor on one of the pronouncements he makes in his introduction, but hesitate to do so because my own writing is involved. Fortunately I can make most of my defense on behalf of another writer accused. Carter states, "Edison went so far as to put 'Irish yews' on the planet

Mercury; and no less a writer than Fritz Leiber, whose world, *Nehwon*, is obviously not our Earth, has his characters riding around on horses, purely products of terrene evolution."

Now I think we can be sure that Edison knew very well that Mercury, the actual planet, was much too hot to support life of any likely kind. His is clearly a fabulous Mercury, perhaps a sort of astrological House of Mercury, its inhabitants by temperament fiery, sometimes fickle in their loyalties, impulsive, prone to swift action—in short, mercurial. And how does the shadowy narrator Lessingham reach this place?—on the command of a talking bird called a martlet and in a chariot drawn by a hippogryph! Futile to ask how there could be men, horses, and yew trees on this world; that is bringing in an argument proper to science fiction. James Blish, L. Sprague de Camp, Hal Clement, Heinlein, and others have set down the proper methods for building up a non-solar planet, and exemplified it in many of their stories. The planet will have a different gravity, rotation, revolution, atmosphere, number of moons, if any, etc.; it will certainly have a different geography, history, and biology. But science fiction is not fantasy, which need only be self-consistent, not science-consistent.

Naturally a fantasy writer may use the science-fiction method for building up his imaginary world, as Lin Carter appears to be doing with *Istradorpha*, whose epic *Rhymyrium* he is bringing us in sections of work-in-progress, the one in this book titled "The Sword of Power." And more power to him! While Tolkien invented new languages for the inhabitants of Middle-earth, and was in part drawn by this problem into creating the *Ring* trilogy. But this method has at least one almost insurmountable drawback: no matter how many strange animals and

weird intelligent tribes there be on such a world, its chief inhabitants must, especially in a fantasy, be men, or else very like men. In science fiction this drawback can be met by having the men a group of space explorers, or on the far-fetched hypothesis of having many planets colonized in far past times by humanoids who reverted to savagry and forgot their origins. Even Edgar Rice Burroughs, in his science-fantasy Mars books, made the chief inhabitants of Barsoom men except for their red color and the oviparous habit of their women.

Or the fantasy writer may set his story on Earth, but in an unknown past, as Howard set his King Kull and Conan tales in forgotten eras about as real as Atlantis and indeed including it; they also include sorcery which works all too well, an ingredient of most fantasies. Or in a future so distant that the very geography of Earth has changed and its men become barbarians or members of weird civilizations knowing nothing whatever of our times, as in his stories of Zothique, which Carter assembled under that title, or in the stories of Jack Vance.

But I believe none of these methods would have worked for Eddison in his *The Worm Ouroboros*, although in the opening he does give his Demons small, burnished horns (and perhaps their enemies the Witches rudimentary tails?), but this is only to give a touch of initial difference and is not made use of in the rest of the novel. The reason is that *The Worm's* characters sing known English songs, recite English poetry and proverbs, and fill their conversations with brilliantly chosen and intermelled scraps of John Webster, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Browning, Homer, and doubtless other poets I do not know or cannot bring to mind. And it turns out toward the end that some of the "Mercurians" revere Apollo and Diana. Now these things are

a part of the great delight of the book, but I see no way of explaining them if the book be set on an actual other planet, or for that matter in some unknown era of Earth's past or future, except by invoking the science-fiction concept of parallel time streams and even the wearisome metaphysical hypothesis that there exist all possible universes and doubtless many impossible to our thinking, a universe in which I mstype the next letter, but otherwise exactly like our own, another universe in which I also mystype it, but in a different way, another . . . Bah! I am bored to death already.

No! Eddison's Mercury is a marvellous mixture of Viking and medieval times, England Elizabethan, Jacobean, Anglo-Saxon, and Arthurian (in all versions of the last), Homeric and Classical Greece, and many other sources hardly to be guessed at. It is to be enjoyed, not justified.

Something of the same, I hope, holds for my stories of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser. They live in a world chiefly inhabited by men like themselves, so it seems equally natural that there should also be horses, cats, pine trees, and so on, along with fantastic humanoids and animals, who seem to be somewhat in the minority, and witches whose magic works. The stories and their background were built up bit by bit. Even the word Nehwon I picked 18 years after the first story was published, and today I know little more about this word than the reader does. No, Nehwon spelled backwards means "no where" as much as "no when." My method seems to suit and liberate my imagination, though I have only admiration for those who choose to construct their fantasy worlds by the more difficult and certainly more laborious science-fictional method.

No matter, in the end the reader always decides. If the particular magic of some

fantasy realm—Alice's, Ghormenghast, Toad's Hall, Munza, Middle-earth—takes him, good. If not, the author can only shrug.

But forget these tiltings, which I have perhaps made over-long. *New Worlds for Old* contains many treasures for the lover of pure fantasy.

SONGS AND SONNETS ATLANTIAN, by Donald S. Fryer, Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin, \$5.00, 134 pp.

This handsome hardcover book is closely related to the softcover reviewed just before it, for it presents an accomplished poet's visualization of the now-sunken continent of Atlantis as it was in its heyday of pomps and pageantries. It contains not only many exquisite poems, but also twelve "Minor Chronicles of Atlantis," prose poems some of which are fascinating short stories.

It is wittily presented as being translated from the Atlantean through the French of the Renaissance Atlantologist, Michel de Labretagne, with notes of the scholar Dr. Ibid M. Andor. The seventeen "Sonnets on an Empire of Many Waters" are memorable, as are the many other poems, some concerned with Atlantis, some not, and some of them tributes to

fellow poets such as Clark Ashton Smith, George Sterling, Ambrose Bierce and, Edmund Spenser. Together with the copious notes of Andor, a total picture of a fabulous Atlantis is presented, more convincing and touching than that of a novel might be.

But the book, written in the course of ten thoughtful years, shows more than that. Sunken Atlantis becomes a symbol of all lost glories and grandeurs of Earth.

The poet came well prepared for his task, having produced or contributed to many biographical and bibliographical works on Smith, Sterling, Bierce, Nora May French, and other poets, not all of them Californian. While the 20-page introduction, additional to the 134 pages mentioned above, explains the background of the book and in particular contains a long analysis of, and an acknowledgement of the poet's indebtedness to the works of Edmund Spenser (and particularly his *The Fairie Queene*), whom Fryer considers the English poet supreme.

The 2,000 copies of the book arrived at Arkham House four days before the untimely death of August Derleth, so in a sense it is the last work published under his aegis. And a gem it is.

—FRITZ LEIBER

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(Continued from page 5)

years). But the appearance of two new digest-sized magazines with quite limited features, *Galaxy* in 1950 and *The Magazine of Fantasy (F&SF)* the year before, probably helped set the new standards. These two new magazines were each, in their own ways, determinedly "adult" in the tone they set. Neither published letters, and while *Galaxy* usually had a brief (and, all too often, contentless) editorial, *F&SF* had none. Both, however, published book reviews. No doubt the idea was to escape from the juvenile image which still plagued the sf pulps—whose letter columns were all too often boisterous and lacking in the appropriate dignity.

To me there was (and is) something a little soulless about a collection of stories packaged without editorial commentary. Even today I find myself swayed in favor of those anthologies or story collections which contain introductory material, either by the editor or by the author. (I suspect many other readers also find this true—and that the copious prefatory material in *Dangerous Visions* was one aspect of its enormous impact.) We want to believe that human beings had a hand in the stories we read, the magazines we buy—or at least I did . . . and still do.

Nonetheless, by 1952 the accepted practice was to drop the features from sf magazines when they switched to the smaller, digest-sized format, and to omit them from newly launched digest-sized magazines. There were exceptions, but only rarely. And the new *FANTASTIC* followed this practice.

True, the "blurbs" for the stories were no longer brief one-liners (*F&SF* had already pioneered the lower-keyed approach which *FANTASTIC* followed), but might even run to two (short) paragraphs—and too, there was an inside-front-cover feature called "They Write

. . ." in which three authors were given brief biographical sketches with accompanying line-portraits (from which I, for one, would not recognize the men in question if I met them at a convention). But that was it. The first issue of *FANTASTIC* did not even carry an editorial to introduce the new magazine. Perhaps the editors considered such self-promotion redundant, preferring to let the selection of stories speak for itself.

It did. Viewed objectively, *FANTASTIC* was one of the most impressive magazines ever launched in the sf field. Rumored to be paying top dollar for the stories, and obviously lavishly printed on good stock, inside and out, the magazine was an immediate success, at least with the critics.

But it was also viewed with a certain cynicism and suspicion. Howard Browne, the editor, was known to be scornful of sf (he preferred to be known as a mystery novelist), and the publisher, Ziff-Davis, while having a number of quality non-fiction magazines like *Popular Photography* to its credit, had a poor reputation for sf and its pulp magazines, all of which aimed at the lowest audience level. How long could they keep it up? How long would they continue to produce such an outstanding magazine as *FANTASTIC*?

Not long, as it turned out.

The second issue of *FANTASTIC* added interior color printing, in what has been rivalled in quality only by the brief-lived *Science Fiction Plus*, Hugo Gernsback's last entry into our field. But the third issue came with a wrap-around strip on its cover blurbing one of Howard Browne's more ghastly mistakes—"The Veiled Woman" by Mickey Spillane.

Spillane was big news in 1952—the hottest selling author in the publishing trade. The introductory blurb for "The Veiled Woman" makes no bones about his primary appeal: "No modern-day

writer is more widely cussed and discussed than Mickey Spillane. Critics regard him as most of us regard the atom bomb, leading magazines dissect him with unloving care. Why? Because the Spillane emphasis is on sex and sadism, his milieu the boudoir and the underworld, his men ruthless, his women svelte, passionate and immoral. That's why everyone hates Spillane—except his millions of readers and his banker!"

Obviously, Browne expected to cash in on this vast readership—just as he did when he published "Mars Confidential" by Lait and Mortimer in *AMAZING STORIES* soon after. The most charitable thing which can be said about this policy is that it was mistaken—and soon abandoned. However, the storm of controversy which Browne stirred up by the publication of these stories, and with his less cautious statements at subsequent conventions about their reception within the sf community, quickly killed the enthusiasm many of us felt for the new magazine, and for the new, revitalized digest-sized *AMAZING STORIES* as well. Rumors flew thick and fast, and one which was never officially denied was that Browne himself had ghost-written "the first science-fiction story by Mr. Spillane." Whatever the case, Mickey Spillane never published anything else remotely identified with sf.

FANTASTIC quickly went from quarterly publication to bimonthly with its third issue and remained a bimonthly for many years thereafter. The logo was updated, and the color printing and quality interior stock was dropped a year later, with the September-October, 1953, issue. The back cover painting had given way to an advertisement an issue earlier. The number of pages dropped from 164 to 148 at the same time, and although a pretense at quality was continued for almost another year, the handwriting on the wall was

plainly seen. By the August, 1954, issue *FANTASTIC* had settled into the old rut only recently vacated by *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES* as a purveyor of fast and easy entertainment. "Ivar Jorgensen," the pseudonymous author introduced by *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES*, was back, and the rest of the names on the contents page were equally inauspicious: Lysander Kemp, Milton Lesser, J. B. Drexel, Winston Marks and Vern Fearing. It's impossible to be sure how many of those names were pseudonyms or house names, but I can vouch only for Lesser as a real author (he later changed his name to Stephen Marlowe and went on to write an increasingly superior line of mystery novels). "Jorgensen" was originally Paul W. Fairman, who, by no coincidence at all, was now the Managing Editor of *FANTASTIC*; at some point about this time, the name was also used by Robert Silverberg, giving rise to the oft-repeated joke that Bob Silverberg always admired Ivar Jorgensen's stories, but little did he dream that some day he'd be *writing* them.

In 1956 Fairman officially took over the editorial reins from Browne; in actual fact he'd been responsible for the editorial content of the magazine for some time previously. He was also responsible for its lowest ebb in quality and probably for the policy which produced this unhappy state of affairs.

During the mid-1950's, a few men single-handedly wrote every issue of both *FANTASTIC* and *AMAZING STORIES*. These men were Robert Silverberg, Harlan Ellison, Milton Lesser, Randall Garrett and Henry Slesar. All were, or became, writers of some note, but their output for *FANTASTIC* must be considered as drudgework with few exceptions. Each was paid a regular monthly "salary" to write a specified amount of wordage. Often stories were assigned to fit pre-existing titles or cover paintings, and few of these

stories appeared under the authors' real names.

Only a couple of years ago, Harlan Ellison phoned me from Los Angeles to ask if I could find a story for him which he had written during this period. It had been a cover story, he said, and he'd been given the title. He had written it and, a few months later, the issue with that cover painting and a story of that title had been published. He had for years assumed that the story was his. But, in recently checking the story, he discovered that it was not his story at all! I spent nearly half an hour—at long-distance rates—checking every story in every issue of *AMAZING* and *FANTASTIC* published during that period, reading the opening paragraphs of the more promising ones to Harlan, but we didn't find his lost story. I don't know what happened to it or why it wasn't published, if indeed it wasn't. But that story is typical of the way the magazine was edited then. I would have to say that it was edited primarily out of contempt. Contempt not only for the readers, but for the authors as well. The fiction was treated like so much yardgoods, to be measured and cut into regular lengths, in order to fill each issue with instantly forgettable stories.

It meant steady money for the authors involved, of course, and a predictable set of formulae for the stories. It also fulfilled our worst suspicions about the kind of sf magazines *AMAZING* and *FANTASTIC* were destined to become. The honeymoon had lasted only a few issues. Now we were back to the days of the pulp *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES*, but without even the balm of interesting features to relieve the monotony. There was something gray and dismal and featureless about *FANTASTIC* during this period. Each issue was exactly like the one which preceded it, as if they'd all been stamped from a machine.

Fortunately, Paul Fairman left the

magazine with the November, 1958, issue, after inflicting upon it the magazine's worst years. His successor was Cele Goldsmith, and she immediately began making improvements, the first of which was to dispense with the stable of housewriters and to open the magazine up once more to sf writers at large. Unfortunately, despite her obvious enthusiasm for sf and the magazines, she was saddled with an "Editorial Director," Norman M. Lobsenz, who wrote all the editorials during her editorship. Obviously inspired by H. L. Gold's frivolous editorials in *Galaxy*, "N.L." (as he signed himself) wrote brief, one-page fillers of no consequence whatsoever, leading more than one reader to suggest that even another advertisement would be preferable.

During Miss Goldsmith's editorial rein the magazine flowered anew. She brought Fritz Leiber back to active fantasy writing, resurrecting his long-dormant Fafhrd-Grey Mouser series and devoting an entire issue to his stories (several years before *F&SF's* first special author issue). She discovered and encouraged writers as diverse as Roger Zelazny, Thomas Disch and Ursula K. Le Guin. The roster of sf authors published during her editorship reads like a listing of Who's Who in contemporary sf—and would be too long to include here. Nearly all Keith Laumer's early novels appeared first in *FANTASTIC* or *AMAZING STORIES*, for example, and sometimes side-by-side with David Bunch, whose stories she championed over occasionally vociferous protests from some readers.

She also reinstituted the letter columns as regular features, and did much to create a strong feeling among her readers that yes indeed, a human being was editing the magazine once more—a human being who cared about the magazine and cared about the readers' responses.

Alas, that her efforts were not more

amply rewarded in the marketplace. Sales, never high, began dipping in the early sixties and dipped further when the price went from 35¢ to 50¢. In 1964 I first heard that the magazines were up for sale. I was at that time the Assistant Editor of *F&SF*, and there was speculation for a time that Mercury Press, *F&SF*'s publisher, might purchase *AMAZING STORIES* and *FANTASTIC*. Naturally, I yearned to become their editor.

I was destined to be disappointed then; in 1965 the magazines were sold to Ultimate Publications. Cele's last issue was the June, 1965, issue, and it had the feeling of a "last issue"—no editorial, no letters, no illustrations—just the stories, bare and unadorned. She'd known about the impending sale for months, of course—long enough to use up the bulk of the inventory. Ziff-Davis had spent all the money on the magazines that the company intended to spend. *FANTASTIC* had lasted thirteen years with its founding publisher. Was that somehow appropriate?

AT THE TIME that Ultimate purchased the two magazines they had been running in the red for well over a year, and prospects were not promising. Indeed, for his money Sol Cohen was getting very little more than a rather shopworn pair of titles, several thousand dollars worth of subscriptions to be honored, and one identifiable asset: second serial rights on the majority of the stories Ziff-Davis had originally purchased and published.

"Second serial rights" means, quite bluntly, the right to republish a story again in a magazine without any additional payment to the author. Ziff-Davis, like most pulp publishers of the thirties, forties and fifties, had routinely purchased second serial rights (and, occasionally, *all* serial rights—the right to republish a story as often as might be

desired) when each story was initially bought. There is nothing unusual about this practice, and most authors went along with it willingly—since most of the time these republishing rights were never used.

The Ultimate policy for bringing the magazines out of the red can be stated concisely: pare all operating expenses to the bone. Originally the plan was to turn both *AMAZING* and *FANTASTIC* into all-reprint magazines, just as soon as the last stories in the inventory inherited from Ziff-Davis were used up. Joseph Ross, a New Jersey high school science teacher, was hired on a part-time basis to select the reprints. His chief qualification was his knowledgeable enthusiasm and his willingness to make his work a labor of love.

Coupled with this policy was a restoration of pages—from 134 to 164—and a vigorous campaign by the national distributor to push the "revitalized" magazines.

Initial reader response was enthusiastic—and why not, when a typical contents page in one of those early *Ultimate FANTASTICS* might list stories by L. Sprague de Camp, Ray Bradbury, Fritz Leiber, Robert Sheckley, Robert Block and John Wyndham—all culled from among the best stories ever published in *FANTASTIC* and *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES*. Sales almost doubled.

But unhappily, the best stories were none too many—most dated from *FANTASTIC*'s first year of publication—unless one ventured into the comparatively recent issues edited by Miss Goldsmith, something which seemed unwise in the middle sixties. And, as time passed, most were republished and fewer and fewer remained for upcoming issues.

Happily, *FANTASTIC* never became an all-reprint magazine. There are several reasons for this, and one of them may well have been the threatened SFWA

boycott against the magazines. This boycott never quite existed, although there was a de facto boycott for a year or more, but it was prompted by the unhappiness of various authors who saw their stories being republished without any additional payment. This was, of course, Ultimate's legal right, and the authors in question had only themselves to blame for having willingly sold reprint rights when they originally sold their stories to Ziff-Davis, but tempers flared and a number of wild accusations were thrown about. I can't help wondering what good a boycott would have been, inasmuch as an effective boycott would simply have closed off the magazines entirely to new stories. (Nor, for that matter, was Ultimate the only publisher to make use of its legal rights to republish stories. Pines Publications, the one-time publisher of *Thrilling Wonder* and *Startling Stories*, has been publishing an annual reprint volume—originally *Wonder Stories*, now *Science Fiction Yearbook*—since 1963, without arousing these same authors.)

The recent history of FANTASTIC hardly requires recounting. Harry Harrison replaced Joe Ross for a space of about a year and was in turn replaced by Barry Malzberg, who seems more comfortable writing stories for FANTASTIC than editing the magazine. I in turn replaced Barry, with the June, 1969, issue. This rapid series of editorial turnovers contributed to the present rebirth of FANTASTIC; each of us was determined to find the key to the magazine's restoration among the first-rank sf magazines, and each of those editors who preceded me helped push the magazine a little closer to that goal.

Today FANTASTIC no longer publishes any reprinted stories (and Ultimate has never purchased any reprint rights), and I think I can state quite honestly that the magazine offers the broadest haven for fantasy of any existing magazine.

Paging through recent issues you will find, cheek-by-jowl, the experimental stories of Ken McCullough, David Bunch and Barry Malzberg, the sword-and-sorcery of Michael Moorcock, deCamp & Carter and Avram Davidson, and the whole broad spectrum of fantasy which exists between these extremes. Forthcoming will be any number of surprises, but one I'll mention right now is L. Sprague deCamp's "The Fallible Fiend," a brand new fantasy novel and his first for magazine publication in many years. It will appear in our December and February issues. The Panshins' epic fantasy novel will follow it.

BUT PERHAPS THE BEST way to celebrate our 20th Anniversary is to make this simple announcement: This year, for the first time in its publishing history, FANTASTIC has been nominated for a Hugo! The winner will be announced at the World Science Fiction Convention to be held in Los Angeles over Labor Day Weekend this year—and we've got strong competition, not excluding our sister magazine, AMAZING. FANTASTIC may not win, but the honor of the nomination, at long last, is worth noting with much pride. So stay with us—one of these days we'll be celebrating our 25th Anniversary, and by then we might have a Hugo to brag about. We'll certainly be doing everything we can to be deserving of one!

—Ted White

ON SALE IN JULY AMAZING

The conclusion of **BOB SHAW's** new slow glass novel, **OTHER DAYS, OTHER EYES** (the sequel to **LIGHT OF OTHER DAYS**)

... According to You



Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet of paper, and addressed to *According to You*, P.O. Box 409, Falls Church, Va. 22046.

The response to my editorial in the April issue was overwhelming—with the Star Trek supporters outnumbering those who agreed with the editorial by at least four to one. The volume of letters was so great that this entire department could be given over to them without printing them all. For that reason, the letters which immediately follow should be considered only a representative sampling, and they will conclude with a letter from the reader who started the whole thing, Mark Stephenson. This will leave us at least a little room for letters on other topics. —TW

Dear Mr. White,

I have just finished reading your April editorial on *Star Trek* and it seems to me that you have missed the point. Sure, some of the devices used were a bit implausible, but were necessary for reasons of time and convenience. You have to remember that the idea of *Star Trek* wasn't to present a scientific journal.

You may think that the characterization wasn't all it should have been, but that is an opinion. In me the characters were, and still are, very alive.

But these things which you talked about, whether true or not, weren't the major thing that in my mind made it

great. I enjoyed *Star Trek* for the simple reason that so many of the episodes (although not all) said something. I can be entertained by *Me and the Chimp*, but does that make me stop and think about something while it does it?

Most shows just give you a building—already built, and although perhaps interesting, not exactly inspiring. With *Star Trek* I got the bricks and got to build with them myself. The purpose of a future environment was to provide a fertile ground for this to grow in.

For example, take the episode "Patterns of Force." It examines the Nazi system and why, even with a basically good man at the head, it won't work.

The gadgets which you scorned were elements for thought themselves. For instance, since the transporter beam operates on a matter-energy-matter conversion, does the man who steps out of the other end of the beam actually have an immortal soul? There was a brief instant in transportation when neither mind nor body existed, so what happens to the soul?

The characters are also an unending source for thought. Countless conversations between Spock and McCoy have brought out human patterns. *Star Trek* was also one of the very few science fiction shows to show aliens as anything but BEMs and power-hungry world-conquering beings.

These facts, along with the entertaining science fiction, are the things that made

Star Trek great. And don't be so sure that *Star Trek* is gone forever. Live long and prosper.

MICHAEL MAIN
9207 Navios Dr. SE
Huntsville, Alabama 35803

Dear Ted,

For all the good things you have done for FANTASTIC and for all the writing and editorial skill you have demonstrated, I fail to understand why, in your April editorial, you chose to disregard logic, established scientific principles, and the differences between factors influencing a televised SF series and those influencing written SF. I and other *Star Trek* fans may deserve to be called "Trekkies," but if you stand firm by some of the more irrational and inaccurate statements of the April editorial, you deserve the position of "Official Ogre."

Some of your criticisms show insight and some suggested corrections and improvements would have possibly improved the program were they utilized at the time. Other connected events which you shed light on, such as Roddenberry's alleged lust for a Hugo (lust being a loaded word with strong connotation), and pre-first season propaganda are undoubtedly accurate, I'm sure, but had little influence on the program content.

Regarding your short consideration of the "Menace" theme, the idea of the Enterprise sailing to the galaxy's edge is not absurd, nor is the idea of the stars stopping at the edge of the galaxy. What did you expect between galaxies, a road-sign designating the end of the Milky Way and the beginning of Andromeda, with no discernible break in the star population? That may happen with cities like Washington, DC, and New York, but galaxies are a different matter. Also, the galaxy has a long radius and a short radius, as you could see from any model of the galaxy, so the distance to said "edge

of the galaxy" can vary considerably. The idea that the stars define a definite edge to the known universe is neither absurd nor is it to be regarded as "Hollywood sci-fi." Or perhaps you are not familiar with the Expanding Universe theories, which do carry some backing from investigations into the red Doppler shift in star spectrograms. At the speed the Enterprise purports to travel, of course, reaching the edge of the universe would require an unfeasible amount of time. Do not discard the Expanding Universe theory because of the distance aspect, or the part it may have played in the concept of a *Star Trek* story.

The engines of the Enterprise do require refueling at regular intervals. Perhaps you overlooked the fact that even matter-antimatter engines eventually require new stores of propellant. Or perhaps you have not progressed beyond the science of the late forties. Various aspects of the warp drive and ion drive were brought out in several episodes, printed stories and *The Making of Star Trek*.

Please refrain from analyzing the feasibility of matter transmitters in general, and specifically the feasibility and assorted aspects of the transmitter used in the series. You have obviously not read the parts in *Spock Must Die* and some of the short stories, or the parts in *The Making of Star Trek* which refer to the transmitter used in *Star Trek*. Coordinates were definitely required to make a transmission, a point brought out in quite a few episodes and printed stories. A fix was usually obtained by triangulation of signals from the personnel communicators. The transmitter was very, very seldom used as a *deus ex machina* device. The writers purposely avoided this pitfall. Monetary considerations played an important part in the decision to use transmitters over shuttlecraft. And naturally the producers would not want the action

slowed down by the use of shuttlecraft to reach a planet from orbit, when it could be easily avoided. The medium is television, not paper. And the time limit is one hour per week. The accuracy of the matter transmitter was commented on in "Court Martial," which was aired the first season. It does have limits, but they are safe ones. A device which regularly materialized people knee-deep in the ground would not be used on a regular basis, obviously.

The connection between the technology of propulsion and that of the matter transmitter are, or should be to an SF editor, painfully obvious. The creation of a matter-negative matter propulsion system would require knowledge of subatomic and molecular structures, as well as the forces involved. Likewise for the auxiliary ion drive (an ion is a charged atom, with an excess or deficit of outer-shell electrons, put simply). Now, the technology which can construct a device which disassembles and reassembles complex molecular structures also requires great knowledge of nuclear, atomic and molecular particles and forces (there is a difference between the three). Thus we have arrived at the connection between the propulsion and transmitter technologies. By the way, there is such a thing as anti-matter; contemporary scientists have constructed it in the lab.

Also, please refrain from analyzing comic book SF until you have assembled sufficient data to make reasonable conclusions. You may know pulp and other printed SF, but the remarks of your editorial and the contents of *The Great Gold Seal*, starring Captain America, show that you are unaware of the principles of and factors influencing comic magazines in general and comic SF.

Yes, Kirk was expendable in an emergency, as were most of the department heads of the Enterprise. They all had backups, as was pointed out in several

printed stories. If the crew of the Enterprise completely fell apart when some of the top officers or department heads were absent, there would be a great inconsistency with the high degree of organization and functionality of the crew under other stress situations. In any military operation, special operation directives are always present covering absence of commanding personnel.

The crew of the Enterprise consisted of about four hundred humans and one Vulcan. Spock may have been a walking computer, often knowing more than Kirk, but unable or unwilling to deal with assorted emotional or emotion-connected problems. Therefore, he was second in command. The Vulcan-crewed ship of the Federation fleet was captained by a Vulcan.

To think that "The real limits are so in the minds of those who conceive and execute a program" is to be naive. Pressures from sponsors, network officials, and myriad other sectors all play a part to some extent in shaping a television program. A television program must appeal to as many segments of the TV audience as possible to remain on the air. Remember that there are more Archie Bunkers in the TV audience than Ted Whites or Mike Balls. Monetary considerations are important, and in *Star Trek's* case, pretty well dictated one set of props and sets, ergo a series featuring regular characters and one format, for the most part. The audience might also be able to identify better with a regular cast. Your expectations were quite high, as you stated, and fit only for a full-length movie produced only for SF people, sporting an almost unlimited budget. Comparing *I Spy* with *Star Trek* is comparing apples with oranges. In any event, *I Spy* didn't last too many seasons either.

It may be your opinion that Blish should be ashamed of the *Star Trek*

books, but somebody bought the six *Star Trek* books. And if you are not ashamed of *The Great Gold Steal*, then Blish should not hide his face either. In any event, have you ever worked with TV shooting scripts which contain mostly dialogue and some notations by the director concerning placement and movements of the actors, changing them into stories for publication? Bear in mind that quite a variety of writers worked out each individual script. If *Star Trek* had not come out as a TV show first, the printed stories would not have come out as they have. Logical?

Lastly, I am disconcerted to find you unable to give credit to *Star Trek* for what it did do: rise above the *Time Tunnels*, *My Living Dolls*, *My Favorite Martians*, *Land of the Giants*, *Lost in Spaces*, and the rest, as well as the dozens of more putrid flicks dubbed sci-fi by the writers of *TV Guide*.

Your field, sir, is written SF.

MICHAEL R. BALL
222 Bradley St.
Dubuque, Iowa 52001

Running down the points you raise, Mike:
1) A galaxy may, from vast distance, seem to have a definite shape, but the actual "edge" of a galaxy simply isn't that neatly defined. Our solar system, for instance, lies on the outer arm of our galaxy, but the night sky is alive with stars in every direction and an "edge" is nowhere discernible. I think I am as aware of both current scientific thinking and astronomy as you, and I found *Star Trek's* "edge of the galaxy" absurd on the face of it. So did Isaac Asimov, in a *TV Guide* article published in 1967. 2) The technology used in propelling the *Enterprise* and in the matter transmitter is simply nonsense—magic disguised with a mumbo-jumbo of seemingly scientific terms. Such pseudo-science is by no means limited to *Star Trek*, of course; it was a mainstay of the interstellar space operas of two and three decades ago—on

which *Star Trek* was closely modelled. But the "consistency" or lack thereof is simply a matter of taking *Star Trek's* writers at face value—"This is this way because I say it is." In point of fact, any society with such sophisticated technology as you describe simply wouldn't function as *Star Trek's* near-future society functioned. 3) "A fix," you say, "was usually obtained by triangulation of signals from the personal communicators." Fine; that locates the ship . . . not the individuals down on that planet. Presumably the ship already knows where it is. 4) This is perhaps not the best place to admit this, but I imagine I am reasonably knowledgeable of "comic magazines in general and comic SF," inasmuch as I once owned a collection of over twenty thousand comics—some years ago. I maintain close friendships within the industry, have written professionally about comic books (see *All in Color for a Dime*) and have been asked by a variety of comics editors to write for comics. (If you don't like *The Great Gold Steal*, just say so, but let's not drag it into this discussion otherwise. Alone among those who have sought to "novelize" comic book superheroes, I made the effort to translate from a primarily pictorial medium into a print medium with an awareness of what was entailed—the translation into "pulp" writing techniques such as were used on *Doc Savage*.) 5) The description you offer of the para-military structure of the crew of the *Enterprise* matches no military structure I've ever heard of. Commonly, the lowest ranking men are the most expendable—not the highest. Inasmuch as the crew of the *Enterprise* is given Navy-like ranks and titles, I'm struck by the notion of a ship's captain leading the landing party onto a beachhead—and I can only shake my head with bemused wonder. Just what, by the way, do those other 390-odd crew members do, anyway? 6) In other words, if the *Star Trek* books sell, they must be

good? Does that mean, then, that books like *Love Story* must be even better? Let's carry the analogy a step further: does that mean *The Beverly Hillbillies* was even better than *Star Trek*? It lasted longer and had a larger audience. 7) Right: *Star Trek* was indeed better than those other quasi-sf shows. So what? 8) My field, fella, is science fiction—pure and simple. —TW

Dear Ted,

Usually I agree pretty much with what you have to say in your editorials; however, your editorial in the April ish of *FANTASTIC* didn't set with me one minute. Your editorial was sort of an attack toward *Star Trek* and I'm sure several of your other readers feel the same. *Star Trek* might not have been the perfect science fiction television program, but it was pretty damn good.

I'm curious to know how you would put out an s-f program if you were a television producer? You know it's hard to make an s-f series that appeals to all people, not just science fiction buffs, and *Star Trek* was close if not perfect in that respect.

Well, I don't want to get this letter too big, as I could go on and say more about *Star Trek*, but I guess everybody has his opinion on *Star Trek*.

W. E. SMITH

[no address on letter]

At the time of the first controversy over Star Trek, I sat down and outlined five ideas for sf television programs which were both good sf and accessible on a mass audience basis. All dealt with the impact upon easily-identified-with characters of sf propositions. If anyone in television is interested, I still have these ideas available.

—TW

Dear Mr. White,

Your recent blasting of *Star Trek* was a long awaited comment I have been looking for in your editorials. But in your haste to put down the show, you left some

highly argumentative holes in your review.

Example: You said Roddenberry used his series for financial exploitation. Ted, every show, after it becomes a hit, sells paperback books, models, and other paraphernalia. (One show, *The Most Deadly Game*, was on television for eight weeks and still had two novels published based on the series' characters.) [No doubt the books were contracted for before the series first went on the air.—TW]

Example: You said that the crew had no sexual drives. Ted, I'm sure that television would gladly show an ensign fucking a yeoman. (By the way, Captain Kirk did get married in one episode to an Indian princess. She was even bearing Kirk's child, but she died after being stoned.) [But not conflict or romance aboard ship? Come, come.—TW]

I believe the series brought out the culture of the Vulcans quite nicely. Many good descriptive things were shown about the Vulcan civilization.

I think *Star Trek* is the best science fiction that will ever be shown on television. Why? The financial matters involved were outrageous. A lot of money was spent just to put on one show. Now if they couldn't do very good with a lot of money. . . .

You said the stories were comic bookish and had no science backing. On an adventure series, to stop and explain every machine would distract from the flow of the story.

In one way, *Star Trek* could have helped the sci-fi media. If people watched *Star Trek* and became interested in that type of tale, they might go out and buy science fiction magazines and books. [But they didn't, did they?—TW]

Well, I've nothing much more to say, except that my neighborhood newsstand gets all the leading sci-fi mags, which

means there's no distribution problem around here.

BERT FURIOLI
225 Brinker Rd.
Wellsburg, W. Va. 26070

Dear Ted,

I enjoyed your editorial reply to my letter concerning *Star Trek* very much, although I never really expected such an enthusiastic reply. Actually, I was kind of flattered over being taken to task in one of my favorite SF magazines. Needless to say, I still don't agree with you over the show's adulthood as a space opera but at this point I think that the whole *Star Trek* question is a dead issue. The show went off the air in 1969 after a—for the most part—disappointing third season, and I think a continuing debate is akin to kicking a dead horse.

I was primarily defending the program's better first and second seasons since the third season featured only four or five episodes out of twenty some shows that had any true redeeming quality. I think in retrospect that I was too hard on Mr. Lundwall when the guy I was the maddest at was Baxter. In his book, *SF in the Cinema*, Baxter, among other things, made the gross misstatement that in the movie "Marooned" the three astronauts were stranded on the moon! And that error was only one of several. I think you can see why, when he began to bombard a program that I liked, I seriously questioned his ability to criticize. So when Lundwall came along I unloaded both barrels at him when there were, in fact, several things about his book that I thought deserved merit. I won't go into that now because there are a few other things I want to say. *But I quite frankly would like to apologize to Mr. Lundwall, although I will not take back a single thing I said about Star Trek.*

Let me say at the outset that I AM NOT A "TREKKIE!" I spoke up about the pro-

gram because as a serious, avid and dedicated SF buff, I saw something in the show's first and second seasons that, no matter what anyone else feels about the program, I personally liked. I am not trying to force my opinion on you or anyone else, nor am I trying to convince you that you should have liked it too. Whatever you or any other fan likes or dislikes is none of my business and, I might add, vice versa. But I am just as sworn to SF as you or any other "lifer" fan and, aside from some very minor side interests, it is my single main preoccupation. I say that to illustrate that I was intensely interested in science fiction before *Star Trek* came around and will remain so long after I forget what the name of the starship was in that program, which could take some time, considering the impact it made.

I have just gotten wind of a so-called *Star Trek* convention that took place a short time ago. In fact, it was announced in *If* magazine. In my opinion that is going from the sublime to the ridiculous. To base a semi-religious cult on a single 3-year TV show does nothing but intensify the opinions of those who didn't like it and disappoint those who did as true SF fans and not as trekkies. I feel the same way about the cultism that has sprung up around Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* and the motion picture *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Sure, like I said, I have three scripts of *Star Trek* in my collection but I have them because they were written by two writers I happen to respect and not just because they are, oh golly gee, *Star Trek* scripts. And I have some outtakes that I mounted in 35mm slide mounts which I bought just for the hell of it. So what?

I also found your description of Roddenberry's activities at the '67 Worldcon most enlightening and I agree with you. His frantic lobbying was not needed nor

was it called for. And I think that if a bunch of morons want to dress up like ersatz Vulcans, complete with cute little plastic ears, to go to a costume party then it's their problem. I agree with you that all the backstage idiocy that went on was pure stupidity but, you see, I didn't know about it when I made my own personal value judgment on whether or not I approved of the program. All I was exposed to was what appeared on my TV every week. (The infamous *Star Trek* catalog was handed to me one day by a real *Star Trek* freak and, admittedly, the two items I mentioned caught my interest. Yes, Mr. White, I thought most of the goodies offered in the catalog were pretty ridiculous and when I finally got around to ordering a couple of things the good old S.T. fans in California screwed the whole thing up so that I had to call long-distance from Illinois to California to find out what the hell was going on!) I am afraid that ever since that time I have been inundated by more *Star Trek* catalogs than I care for or know what to do with. If you want them I'll be glad to mail them to good ole Flushing, N.Y. (Don't get mad. That was just a joke!)

I've been keeping my fingers crossed for the past couple of years for something to come along that's better than everything we've seen so far in the way of sf on television. At one time CBS had a show in the works called "Colony 1" about the first permanent moon base in the future. Whatever happened to it I don't know. I had my own idea once that I drew out of NBC's *The Bold Ones*. Why not take a couple of prominent sf series characters, like for instance Laumer's "Retief" and Anderson's "Flandry," and base a weekly TV series on them? You could switch off from one to the other each week. You could even follow the current TV medical trend and throw in Leinster's star medic "Calhoun" to make

a triad. Sounds far out but I think it's worth a thought. What do you think?

I'm just trying to say, Ted, that I am a science fiction fan and not a trekkie and that I viewed the now defunct *Star Trek* as a piece of sf in general and not as a Spock worshipper. To even suggest to me something like Captain Future or (you guessed it!) Perry Rhodan is enough to set off an extremely nauseous sensation in my stomach. We just saw something quite different in the same sf program and reacted to it in different ways. I'm prepared to let it go at that.

As for AMAZING and FANTASTIC, your taking over as editor was the best thing that ever happened to those mags. You've probably been told this a hundred times but let me repeat it. The stories and the cover art are getting better with each issue. I think the interior artwork still needs a little work but it's been steadily improving too. And I hope that your distribution and sales pick up rapidly also, because, to tell the truth, I'm looking forward to the day when both AMAZING and FANTASTIC, and also *Galaxy* and *If* can go monthly again. I guess we're just in a low trend in the consumption of sf magazines, although nothing could be as bad as the carnage of dead sf magazines after the first Sputnik went up in '57. I've made up my mind that I'm subscribing to AMAZING and FANTASTIC as soon as I can because they're getting too damn hard to find on the stands.

Re: John Leavitt's letter in the April 1972 issue of FANTASTIC: Science fiction is *definitely* big enough to accommodate both the Dischs and Ballards as well as the Sturgeons and Andersons, and I hope to God that one will never have to be sacrificed for the other. Where would sf be now without the latter and where would it be going without the former? And not all space operas have comic book plots, but we've been all over that already,

haven't we? There's not a damn thing wrong with sitting down and reading both sides of an Ace double and enjoying it for what it is and then turning around and reading Ballard's *Vermilion Sands*. Yes, you've got to be critical but you don't have to be a downright sorehead about 90 percent of all the SF you read. And I also agree that it is possible to be a fannish fan and a sercon fan at the same time. That's what I've been trying to do for the last ten or eleven years. And aside from crusading among friends for a more serious, and yet fun attitude for science fiction, I've been plugging your two magazines for completely selfish reasons. The more people that I and other fans convince to buy AMAZING and FANTASTIC the sooner both mags will go monthly again. I assume that is what you would ultimately want also, Ted.

And will you please do me a favor? Badger Panshin into getting another Tony Villiers novel out. It's been a long time between shows and he's got a real good series going in Villiers.

That's about all I have to say for now. I just felt compelled to write to say, and I say again, I AM NOT A TREKKIE! Just because we disagreed on *Star Trek* doesn't prove either one of us right or wrong. It proves that we disagree. Between the two of us I think we represented both sides of the issue equitably. I like you as a writer and an editor, I like your magazines, I love science fiction and I still liked *Star Trek's* first and second seasons. I guess you just can't win 'em all, Ted. Keep up the good work, as one of your other letter writers already said, and take it easy. Hope to see you at the L.A. Worldcon if I can scrape up the bread to get there. Peace.

MARK STEPHENSON
2305 W. Country Lane
McHenry, Ill. 60050

Dear Mr. White,

In reply to the letter from Jeffrey S.

Anderson in the April 1972 issue of FANTASTIC and for the information of other persons interested in indexes to SF magazines, you might note the existence of the following indexes:

- 1) *Index to the S. F. Magazines, 1926-1950*
by Don Day (hardbound)
- 2) *Index to the S. F. Magazines, 1951-1965*
by Erwin Strauss \$8.00 (hardbound)
- 3) *Index to the S. F. Magazines, 1951-1965*
by Stark and Metcalfe (paperbound)
- 4) *Index to the S. F. Magazines, 1966-1970*
by NESFA \$5.00 (hardbound)

Each of the above attempts to cover all English language science fiction magazines for its time period. NESFA also produced one year indexes for the years 1966, 67, 68, and 69 which are no longer available. NESFA may soon produce a one year supplement for 1971. The indexes listed above with prices are currently available from NESFA. Those listed above without prices as well as numerous more restricted indexes are available from various dealers. (For example, F. and S. F. Book Co., P.O. Box 415, Staten Island, NY 10302).

Hoping I have been of assistance,

DONALD E. EASTLAKE, III
Chairman, Index Committee
New England Science Fiction Assn.
Box G, MIT Branch Station
Cambridge, Mass. 02139

Thanks for the information, Donald. I have both the original Day index and Strauss's, but Jeffrey Anderson's actual request was "Is there some sort of index of contents (essays and stories) to AMAZING and FANTASTIC?" The indexes you listed don't include the non-fiction; nor, of course, has anyone that I know of done specific indexes for just these two magazines. (In a recent issue of LOCUS, Tony Lewis, in reviewing the April FANTASTIC, took me to task for

not mentioning the above indexes and seemed to see therein nefarious motives on my part. He misread us both.)—TW

Dear Mr. White:

Been meaning to write you for a month now—the happy result of my having discovered the lively new FANTASTIC and AMAZING. I'm flabbergasted at the excellence of those publications, which, when last I looked (some dozen years ago, I confess), were unable to hold my attention from one issue to the next. That year, 1960, was a bad one for me: I graduated from high school and promptly (pompously) gave up science fiction, rock 'n' roll, comics, and those other trappings of my late, lamented youth. Rock caught me back around '65-'66, and science fiction novels a few years ago when I happened on Zelazny and Delany and *Dune*. But it's taken until 1972 and my sudden collapse/ascension into comic books and fandom for me to take notice of the so-called "pulp" once more. Let me explain: Neal Adams hooked me, and then I started digging all the other young artists like Jones, Kaluta, Wrightson, Bodé, and others. And in seeking out their work for publications other than comics—*voilà*, FANTASTIC and AMAZING! And they are too. Kudos to you, sir, for such editorial acumen: lively stories, first-rate illoes, sage columns, and a wide-open letters section. If I'm not careful, I may wind up a serious sci-fi fan. . . .

But enough preamble. I'm actually writing here and now to comment briefly on two or three elements in the April FANTASTIC. Busby's "Puiss of Krrlik" bowled me over—an incredible trip into an unsettling, wholly alien mode, simultaneously turning the stomach and boggling the mind. As for the rest of the fiction, haven't really dug in yet because I'm busy reading the non-fiction stuff first these days.

Your anti-*Star Trek* editorial, for ex-

ample. I enjoyed that show for the first year or so, but then grew as tired as their plots and characters. However, you and your readers might like to know that *Star Trek* reruns have been playing on local TV stations five days a week, every week, in all the years since the show's network cancellation. My eight-year-old son would watch every episode (for the tenth time, some of them) if he had his way. A comment on TV now and also, dare I say it, on the age-level of *Star Trek*. Beyond that, I must also add that *Star Trek*'s time slot is supposedly the most lucrative ad-market for Puget Sound television—both the highest rates and the best returns. What do you make of that?

And, finally, Mr. Panshin's continuing series on the renaming of science fiction. Nomenclature and categorization never have interested me; all those graduate school anatomies of this and that were a bore. Panshin's much better than that junk, of course—much more readable and probably more intelligent too. But I wish he'd stop *worrying* the topic so. Whether it's called creative fantasy, speculative fantasy, speculative fiction, science fiction, Old Wave or New, don't we all know what we're talking about and/or reading? More fantasy (*à la* the Panshins' own wonderful "Sky Blue") and less speculation, please.

I commend to you a well-known poem (by English poet Henry Reed), "Naming of Parts," which says all that I've been stumbling over—and with all the charm and eloquence and *élan vital* that exercises in pigeon-holing and letters to the editor so sadly lack.

Eagerly anticipating the Shaw and Panshin novels, I remain

ED LEIMBACHER
1631-4th Ave. W.
Seattle, Wa. 98119

Dear Editor White,

I have, quite by accident, just purchased the April issue of FANTASTIC. I

have just found out that the distributors may not *always* hinder sales of your magazines, and decided to write you as you may be interested. I live in a town which has a population of about 12,000, and am unable to travel to any metropolitan center for my first love, sf prozines. I was becoming gloomier and gloomier after moving here, because I could find no more than a few copies of the sf magazines, usually *F&SF*; my favorites, *AMAZING* and *FANTASTIC* were simply not to be found at any of the six drugstores in the area (only one of which carries *any* science fiction magazines). A trip to the local distributor did nothing, since all orders are handled by some nameless computer in Minneapolis; the locals just take a stack to this store and a stack to that store. No records are kept anywhere along the line, so even the shopkeepers didn't know for sure if they received any science fiction magazines! No hope anywhere for me, until by pure chance today I was able to catch a clerk at the corner drugstore putting out the magazines. I mentioned that I'd hoped to find some new sf magazines today, and to make this short, it turned out that she had some in a pile. She explained that she once put some out but they never seemed to sell, so she stopped doing that and sent them all back as they came in, without displaying them!

(It's no wonder that the sf magazines did not seem to sell, hidden as they were in a corner under *Alfred Hitchcock's Magazine* and some of those do-it-yourself astrology pulps.) I did manage to get her word of honor that she'll put them out from now on, but only time will tell whether she follows through on that.

Anyway, such a circumstance never occurred to me; it seems a pretty stupid thing to do if one wants to sell as much goods as possible. I thought you might be interested so that you could place a

warning in a future editorial. You have to seek out the clerks who actually handle the magazines, by the way, since I had earlier talked to the manager and he knew nothing about sf magazines. I wonder how many fans are frustrated in similar small towns by such actions? [*Quite a few, I'd guess.*—TW]

One comment on your editorial in the April issue. In this editorial you told of letters you received from Star Trek defenders who took exception to a casual comment made in an earlier editorial. You sounded rather frustrated at it all, and I was severely tempted to write an angry letter blasting you for your derision of comics in this latest editorial, but after the first urge subsided, I realized you might not appreciate the humor of it.

One last item concerns the J. Allen St. John Portfolio in this issue. I won't bother with the fact that two illustrations barely constitute a portfolio, instead I want to urge you to use such fillers in the future, but with brief informative editorial comments similar to what Sam Moskowitz uses for fiction collections. At least the issues and dates from which the drawings come! I think such drawings are a great way to use up a left-over page or two, especially if the drawings are from the pen of Virgil Finlay.

Keep up with the striking covers, one of the many elements which compels me to read every issue (that I can find) from cover to cover. And thank you for your attention.

CHARLES T. SMITH
620B Front St.
Brainerd, Minn. 56401

Congratulations for having lucked into one of the secrets of newsstand distribution—it's handled almost entirely by people who simply couldn't care less about it. (Locally, one drugstore which receives a large quantity of magazines piles the new ones in a

shopping cart in random order, apparently choosing for display only those easily taken from the top. The remainder—a full shopping cart's worth!—are returned immediately.) About the only way we're going to get our magazines back on display is for each and every reader in circumstances similar to yours to do exactly what you did. I don't deride comics *per se*—and there are those who feel I give them entirely too much space in these pages—but I am well aware of both their limitations and the thought which goes into their creation. A review of Roy Thomas' adaptation of the Conan stories to comic magazine format was squeezed out of this issue, for example, but will be forthcoming—along with another of de Camp & Carter's new Conan novellas, by the bye. . . . I wish I could do as you suggest with our occasional portfolios, but these are last-minute additions to the magazine when we discover ourselves a few pages short, and their selection is made by the publisher just before we go to press. —TW

Ted:

Enjoyed the April issue of FANTASTIC. The cover by Mike Hinge was certainly one of the best I've seen recently. However, I wish that the art could have been expanded to occupy a larger portion of the cover. I've seen scenes on postage stamps which were larger than that on the April cover.

I'm glad to see that the "Famous Fantastic Classic" has at long last been put out of its misery. It always annoys me in the extreme to see a magazine leaning on its glories from the past, although I don't particularly mind seeing the reprinting of old artwork, if for no other reason than to compare it with the inferior stuff which passes nowadays.

John Fortey in his letter gives the Latin version of "Don't let the bastards grind you down" as being "Nil bastardae carborundum." I had always thought it to

be "Non illegitimus carborundum," but then I never was very good in Latin.

My main reason for writing is to protest the fact that all too often stories are reprinted in book form within such a short time of appearing in magazine form. It is hardly worth my while to subscribe to FANTASTIC or, for that matter, to any other magazine when I know that the cream of the stories will be skimmed off and reprinted within a year or less of the original publication in the countless anthologies which litter the shelves.

An outstanding example is your novel "Quest of the Wolf" (*Star Wolf*, or whatever), the first half of which appeared in April '71 FANTASTIC (titled "Wolf Quest"), an issue which I apparently missed. Suddenly in the December issue you announced: ". . . if Lancer Books' schedule allowed we'd bring you the second half of my novel. . . . Unfortunately, Lancer's schedule does not allow. . . ." Now Ted, what's the use of publishing only half a novel? Indeed, what's the use of publishing any novel when it is almost immediately going to appear in print elsewhere?

There are many more examples (how about Brunner's "Dread Empire" novellette which appeared in Ace's *The Traveller in Black* even before the magazine version?), which I am sure my fellow readers are only too well aware of. A magazine's circulation is certainly not increased by such occurrences and it's easy to see why so many SF magazines are having trouble staying afloat. It's all too easy to blame "the distributors" for poor circulation (although they are to blame to a certain extent) when the problem lies mainly elsewhere.

All of this leads up to Gordon Eklund's new novel "Beyond the Resurrection," the first part of which appeared in April FANTASTIC. I enjoyed the first part immensely, but this places me in something

of a dilemma. Perhaps you can help me. Tell me Ted, is it worth my while buying the June issue of **FANTASTIC** for the conclusion of this excellent novel, or should I wait for the complete paperback to come out (in one month's time? two months? three months?) ?????

ED SINKOVITS
397 Home St.
Winnipeg, Manitoba
CANADA R3G 1X5

P.S. **FANTASTIC** enjoys pretty good distribution up here at several small outlets. Unfortunately, **AMAZING** is not distributed up here at all.

You bring up a tricky problem, Ed. But before attempting to deal with it, let me answer your last question. "Beyond The Resurrection" was written to be Gordon Eklund's third Ace Special. However, the series was killed last year (and his second novel has yet to be published by Ace), and after Terry Carr left Ace the novel was turned down (for reasons I fail to comprehend). To date, it has not yet been accepted by another publisher, although I believe Gordon is now submitting it to the more prestigious hardcover houses, and I expect it will be published as a book eventually. This returns us to your real question—the matter of serials (or shorter stories) which pop up soon after in book form. It's a tricky point, as I said. These days many novels are written first for book publication, and then offered for serialization. When one looks at it from the author's point of view, this makes good sense: sf is not a high-paying market and he may double his income on a novel through serialization. From the reader's point of view it's another story, of course, but I might ask you an analogous question: What do you think about the publication of a novel in hardcovers and then, soon after, in paperback form? As an editor, I am delighted to publish the best stories I can get. This often means accepting a novel which I know will

be published in book form soon after we serialize it. Since we do not cut our serials, they are substantially the same as the book versions (some editors have actually used tearsheets from our magazines, saving themselves the chore of copyediting), and you might as easily ask, why buy the book if you own the magazine version? In magazine form the serial has cost you \$1.20—as opposed to 75¢ to 95¢ in paperback—but you've also gained the equivalent in wordage of a second book in the rest of the material published in those two issues of our magazine (a "savings" of 30¢ to 70¢). As for the Brunner novelette, we purchased it, like the one before it (also in the Ace book), in good faith and before it had been scheduled for book publication. (In fact, our publication of the earlier Traveller in Black novelette was what brought the series to the attention of Ace editor Terry Carr.) Unfortunately, we had to hold "Dread Empire" for a matter of some months before we could publish it, simply because at that time novelettes of that length had to go into an issue which didn't have a serial, due to space limitations. In the meantime, the book (containing all four novelettes) was sold to Ace and scheduled for almost immediate publication. When Carr and I discussed our mutual schedules, one of us misunderstood the other, and the book (which I understood to be scheduled a month later than it was) came out first. This is the sort of thing which can happen and has happened before—notably in the case of a Jack Vance novel which was set for serialization in another magazine, but appeared on the stands suddenly in book form, forcing a last-minute reshuffling at the magazine and some rather strained tempers all around. Inasmuch as we try to keep this sort of thing from happening, and we've published several excellent novels which have never been published in book form (Piers Anthony's "Hasan," and Philip K. Dick's "A. Lincoln, Simula-

crum," for example), you'd be wise to stick with us on future serials. For the record: Avram Davidson's serial which begins this issue will be published eventually by Avon, but not in the immediate future; Sprague de Camp's "The Fallible Fiend," which will be our next serial, is scheduled for publications next year by Signet; and the Pan-shins' fantasy novel, to follow de Camp's, will probably be published eventually in hardcovers, but has no present publisher set (it was originally to be an Ace Special). Next door, at AMAZING SF, Greg Benford's "Jupiter Project" has no book publisher as yet, either. —TW

Dear Ted White:

Somewhere along the line somebody forgot to insert any notation at all that Gordon Eklund's "Beyond the Resurrection" was/is a serial. Normally I save serials for reading when I have all the parts in hand, but the first I knew that Eklund's novel was being run as a serial was after reading part I, when I ran up against the words "to be concluded."

I admit a little analysis of the contents page or a look at the page before the next item listed (i.e., 66-1=65) would have alerted me to the situation, but I think I'm entitled to be the average careless reader insofar as expecting you to label serials clearly. Truth in labeling and all that.

Of course, it is true that AMAZING and FANTASTIC underlabel serials as a matter of routine. For example, Bob Shaw's "Other Days, Other Eyes" in May AMAZING is identified as a serial only on its opening page, page 6. But at least it is labeled there, and as a regular reader I have developed the habit of checking the first page of a featured story, since I know that the cover and contents page are routinely misleading.

Glad to see that the worst is over, financially. I have in Berkeley, San Francisco, and now here attempted to buy my

copies regularly from newsstands in such a way as to—I hope—encourage distribution. I would think that the distribution monopoly would be ripe for government regulation like any other utility, except that there is such a miserable history of such regulation. Do you ever get the feeling that there are no right answers to any problem at all, only wrong ones, and that the best action is therefore no action? Some part of me insists that there must be a way to fight for a better world, but problems like yours just make it all that much harder to keep a positive attitude, so here's hoping things get noticeably better soon. I think it will improve every fan's spirits.

BOB SIEMER

2204 Fair Oak View Terrace

Los Angeles, California 90039

As an editor, in the editorial matter (blurbs and whatnot) I try to indicate every serial as such, but I am not responsible for the contents page listings, nor the actual typographical makeup of the title page of the stories—which I do not see until I have an actual copy of the issue in hand. I can, therefore, only offer our apologies for the fact that "Part One" was inadvertently left off, and assure those of you who felt cheated that this was an honest error and not an attempt to deceive. It's scant consolation, of course, but I might refer you to my editorial remarks, on page 128 of that issue, in which I suggested that with this particular novel it might be worth holding the first instalment unread until the second was in hand, a practice I routinely follow myself. Some readers, who read the editorial first, have told me that they decided to do just that—but of course it would be unreasonable of me to expect that everyone would read the editorial first.

Thus we bring to an end our 20th Anniversary issue. I hope you've all enjoyed

reading it as much as I have enjoyed putting it together, and I trust you'll be with us next issue, because every issue looks to be just as exciting! Next issue

we'll conclude "The Forges of Nainland Are Cold," and Mike Hinge has another of his vibrant new cover paintings for us. You won't want to miss it. —Ted White

(Continued from page 78)

on me; I like it, it sounds real good," but by then I couldn't find him and it was too late; it was time to bet in fact and I never saw him again. Maybe I should have been more alert but you can understand my condition: I am thousands of dollars down for the year. And the year not half over.

IX

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I saw them going down the backstretch: just a hint of haze, no problems, the colors clearly identifiable and then, coming into the stretch turn, it all started to go. I lost the call; first the track seemed to explode, leaping about them in clouds of earth, then the lake dissolved, the swans squawking as they foundered in black putrid waters leaping to absorb them; then I could see the grandstand in the distance tottering, the grandstand falling toward the earth, crumbling section by section into the dark, viscous mass that the track had become, the line of destruction moving closer and closer to the clubhouse, to *me* and I tried to scream, tried to warn them then, the call com-

pletely gone, the race destroyed, tried to warn them but the microphone melted like fire in my hand and the door was locked: I shouted with the mystery of it and felt myself falling a hundred miles into sea: the pain then overtaking me and a voice came from somewhere to say *it has to be this way for I have deduced it; I should have known it a long time ago* and then nothing more, nothing until this interrogation, the forms, the questions, the pencil and necessity and I understand none of it, my only job being to call the races (I never bet) and the race dissolving then before me: this I could not forget, that the last race was impossible to call but I only screamed with the pain of it and now I hear from your Bureau that the pain was necessary.

I don't think that even racing is necessary.

X

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